

Peter Symonds 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. Peter Symonds College is a sixth form college located in Winchester. It attracts students not only from the city and surrounding area but also from Southampton and parts of Wiltshire. The college has boarding facilities and is the sixth form college for the Falkland Islands. The proportion of young people achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C in Hampshire is above the national average. Despite the popularity of the college it is not selective. The college serves a mostly prosperous area with high rates of employment in business and commerce. Employment in the manufacturing industries is relatively low. The mission of the college stresses the value it places on meeting the learning needs and aspirations of individual students and, in doing so, seeking the highest quality in all aspects of its work. Provision for

adults is largely based at a dedicated adult community education centre, located one mile away from the main site. In 2006/07 the college had 2,832 full-time students aged 16-18 and 1,721, mostly part-time, adults. A further 1,600 adults follow self-funding leisure programmes. Students aged 16-18 account for 90% of total enrolments and 91% of full-time equivalent students. Of the young people attending the college on a full-time basis, 97% follow GCE AS or A level programmes. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds constitute 7% of the college community, which is significantly higher than the population in the Winchester area.

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

2. Overall effectiveness is outstanding. Students' success rates are very high. Almost all students who enrol on long courses complete their programmes of study and gain their qualifications. The progress A level students make is very good and a much higher than average proportion achieve high grades. Different groups of students, including those from minority ethnic groups, achieve well and the college's promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding. Teachers and managers are reflective and benefit from the many opportunities provided to share and develop good practice. Teaching and learning are outstanding, as are the guidance and support provided for students. Assessment of students' work is rigorous and their progress is carefully monitored by subject teachers and tutors who make very good use of well designed information systems. Where intervention is necessary it is prompt and effective. The college is committed to inclusion and students have access to a very broad range of academic courses and a variety of vocational courses that reflect local needs. Students make full use of the excellent enrichment opportunities offered. Leadership and management are outstanding. Quality assurance procedures are highly effective in maintaining high standards and promoting improvement. The use of data to support improvement is exemplary. Self-assessment reports are clear, precise and accurate in their judgements.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

3. Capacity to improve is outstanding. The outstanding performance identified at the last inspection has been maintained and aspects improved. Leadership and management are excellent and staff at all levels share a commitment to achieving the best for individual students. Managers and teachers are reflective and self-critical. Quality assurance procedures are highly effective in promoting continuous improvement. Lesson observation procedures are robust. Staff development opportunities are extensive and clearly focused on teaching and learning. Self-assessment is rigorous and the use of data to monitor performance and support improvement is excellent. The self-assessment report identifies strengths and areas for development accurately.

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

4. Despite the high standards reported in the last inspection report and the relatively minor aspects that required improvement, the college has continued to improve and the effectiveness of the steps taken to promote improvement are outstanding. Student success rates have improved and guidance and support for students have been developed further. The curriculum offer for adults has been changed considerably in response to

changing demands. Quality assurance of adult programmes and the use of data to monitor adult achievement have been enhanced. Much attention has been paid to promoting equality and diversity and the 'Every Child Matters' themes. The college has continued to improve resources and accommodation and developments include a new library and resources centre.

Key strengths

- outstanding achievement and high standard of students' work
- highly effective teaching and learning
- broad and inclusive sixth form college curriculum
- exceptionally good use of data to support learning
- excellent quality assurance procedures that maintain high standards and promote improvement
- highly effective guidance and support for students
- extensive and well attended enrichment activities that broaden students' horizons
- outstanding leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the consistency of target setting in progress review action plans to help students improve.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. As identified by the college in its self-assessment report, students' achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates at level 3, which constitute by far the majority of the college's provision, are consistently well above the high national average for sixth form colleges. Only for a very small minority of programmes is performance below average. Retention rates are exceptionally high with almost all students who enrol on long programmes completing. For AS level subjects, pass rates are much higher than the national average for sixth form colleges with almost half of all entries achieving A or B grades. Pass rates on A2 subjects are also consistently high with 56% of entries achieving high grades in 2006/07. The progress A level students make in comparison with that predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades is very good. Most students achieve their predicted grades and many do better. The college enters all A level students for both AS and A2 general studies and 81% left the college with A2 general studies in 2006/07. Over a four year period, the number of students achieving key skills qualifications has improved dramatically and, in 2006/07, the proportion of students achieving level 3 key skills was over twice the rate for sixth form colleges nationally. Pass rates for students re-sitting GCSE subjects are similar to the national average for similar colleges but the proportion achieving grades A* to C are much higher than average. The college is meticulous in its analysis of the performance of different groups of students. Both male and female students achieve very well; the gender gap is small and lower than the national average gap for sixth form colleges. Success rates for all but two minority ethnic groups are significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges. The standard of students' work is consistently very high. Students enjoy their time at college as reflected in the high attendance rate of 92%.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Most lessons are at least good and a significant proportion is judged outstanding by the college's rigorous and well organised lesson observation system. Teachers are highly qualified and enthusiastic subject specialists. They are confident, prepare well and ensure their students are clear about the purpose of individual lessons. Most lessons include a good variety of relevant activities that interest and challenge students and allow them to work independently or in small groups at an appropriate pace. Teachers are confident users of information and communication technology (ILT) and students benefit from its effective use in lessons. Differentiated activities are pre-planned, enabling students to learn at a pace that is appropriate for their ability. Teachers share good practice well in a variety of ways. As identified by the college in its self-assessment, internal quality review assistants, faculty teaching and learning

reports, external quality reviews and in-service training events all contribute well to the college ethos of improving learning.

7. A key strength of the college is the highly effective way in which different forms of support are integrated to add to the learning that takes place in the classroom. An extensive range of subject workshops helps students make the best of their time. Workshops are well attended by students who come to complete assignments, seek help with aspects of work they have found difficult and gain in confidence. Additional learning support for those with diagnosed disabilities, dyslexia and other learning needs is highly effective, and learning support staff provide excellent one-to-one support. College data show that those accessing support make at least as good progress as those who do not. Assessment of students' work is very thorough, well organised and centrally recorded, providing easy access for teachers and tutors to the information required to monitor students' progress, plan interventions and provide support when required. Communications between subject and pastoral teams have recently been strengthened, enabling staff to work together very effectively to address the individual needs of students promptly. The high quality of assessment and progress monitoring together with close working between subject, pastoral and learning support teams also make a significant contribution to the high levels of success enjoyed by students at the college.
8. Bearing in mind the primary focus of the sixth form college curriculum, the college's response to meeting the needs and interests of its students is outstanding. The college correctly concludes in its self-assessment report that a very wide range of A and AS level courses is effective in meeting the academic needs of the school leavers in Winchester and the surrounding area. The college does not select students on ability and entry requirements are fair and appropriate. A small number of level 2 courses are also provided for full-time students aged 16-18. The college collaborates well with local providers to ensure that the level 1 and level 2 vocational provision meets the needs of the area. The enrichment programme for full-time students is outstanding and students are encouraged effectively to contribute to the life of the college and the local community. A very wide range of cultural and sporting activities is offered and participation rates are high. Adult and community education has developed significantly since the last inspection. Currently the college works with over 70 small and medium sized enterprises providing NVQ and other training. In addition, over 600 army recruits successfully complete entry and level 1 literacy programmes that the college provides. In the recent past the college used European Social Fund monies well to provide basic skills programmes for men from isolated rural communities. The college also provides full cost leisure programmes, mainly language courses, for around 1,600 adults.
9. Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Initial advice and guidance for potential students is excellent. Links with local secondary schools, and others across the surrounding area, are good and productive. Induction arrangements for 16-18 year-old students are excellent. All students, both full- and part-time, undergo an initial diagnostic

test to determine any additional learning needs which leads to prompt learning support where appropriate. Pastoral support for learners is highly effective. At the time of the inspection, group tutorials had recently been reviewed and re-developed following detailed consultation and careful analysis of students' views. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that the content of some group tutorial sessions requires further development to ensure they fully reflect students' changing needs and interests. One-to-one tutorial support is highly effective. Target setting and the review of students' progress are very good. Clear, regularly updated electronic records enable personal tutors, subject teachers and managers to track progress and instigate any relevant interventions. The college has, however, correctly identified in its self-assessment report that action plans prepared to help students to improve further following subject reviews are not all of a high standard. The college provides a safe and welcoming setting for learning and pastoral support is very strong. Communication with parents and guardians is very effective. Students are encouraged to express their views in order to influence the development of both individual programmes and the college overall; their views are respected and acted upon. Careers education and guidance for university applications are excellent and students' progression rates to higher education are impressive. Over 750 students progress directly to undergraduate study each year and around 40 obtain places at Oxford or Cambridge universities.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior managers are unequivocal in their expectation of high standards. They have successfully established an open and participative approach to management that is appreciated by staff. Communication is very effective at all levels. Staff are respected for their professionalism and are committed to ensuring individual students achieve their potential. Students' achievement and the standard of their work are consistently high and the college is true to its mission to achieve the best for individual students.
11. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are very well designed and staff value the approach adopted. Compliance with quality assurance procedures is high and their use by staff at all levels is highly effective in maintaining high standards and supporting improvement. Lesson observation procedures are robust, focus clearly on the impact of teaching on learning and are very effective in promoting improvement. Access to, and the use of, data to support self-assessment and continuous improvement are exemplary. Self-assessment reports are clear and precise in their judgements.
12. Resources for learning are very good and are used well. Teachers are well qualified and benefit from a wide range of staff development opportunities.

The performance of teachers as well as other staff is carefully appraised and there are excellent opportunities for sharing good practice. Both the main and the adult sites provide appropriate settings for learning and there have been many improvements since the last inspection. A minority of classrooms are cramped at times, as are some of the communal areas used by students.

13. Governors are highly committed to the college and contribute appropriately to its strategic development. They are supportive of its staff and monitor its financial and academic performance carefully. Financial management is strong. Governors and senior managers are prudent in their investment in resources and accommodation and are careful to maximise the impact of expenditure on learning.
14. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college has responded well to legislation relating to disability and race equality. The performance of different groups of students, including minority ethnic groups, those with learning difficulties and disabilities and vulnerable groups, is carefully monitored. Support is provided as required and these students make good and often better progress. Equality, diversity and the 'Every Child Matters' themes resonate well with the values of the college and feature strongly in different aspects of its work. Many opportunities are provided to promote success and raise students' aspirations. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet government requirements and are carefully monitored.

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.

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>
1 long	04/05	89	66	64	2	724	78	56	22
	05/06	91	76	71	5	475	72	56	16
	06/07*	7	57	N/A	...	450	68	N/A	...
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	4	25	71	-46	...	...	...	...
	05/06	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	...	...	N/A	...	...	...	N/A	...
Other	04/05	85	68	63	5	724	78	56	22
	05/06	91	76	71	5	475	72	56	16
	06/07*	7	57	N/A	...	450	68	N/A	...

* college data (validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 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>
2 Long	04/05	304	83	73	10	273	74	56	18
	05/06	267	84	78	6	259	77	64	13
	06/07*	254	86	N/A	...	289	73	N/A	...
GCSEs	04/05	220	85	78	7	42	69	65	4
	05/06	184	85	82	3	57	65	66	-1
	06/07*	170	89	N/A	...	45	82	N/A	...
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	59	78	74	4	1	100	...	...
	05/06	51	86	77	9	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	53	85	N/A	...	...	...	N/A	...
NVQs	04/05	2	50	62	-12	46	74	58	16
	05/06	4	25	70	-45	40	83	68	15
	06/07*	7	...	N/A	...	63	67	N/A	...
Other	04/05	23	78	62	16	184	76	52	24
	05/06	28	79	70	9	162	80	61	19
	06/07*	24	75	N/A	...	181	73	N/A	...

* college data (validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 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	11059	90	82	8	213	59	59	0
	05/06	11949	92	83	9	200	73	65	8
	06/07*	12004	92	N/A	...	196	80	N/A	...
A/A2 Levels	04/05	4305	94	92	2	30	77	76	1
	05/06	4505	96	93	3	23	91	78	13
	06/07*	5803	95	N/A		11	100	N/A	
AS Levels	04/05	6619	88	78	10	34	44	54	-10
	05/06	7163	90	79	11	23	74	58	16
	06/07*	6618	90	N/A		15	60	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	110	80	74	6	...	...	...	...
	05/06	77	70	74	-4	...	...	...	...
	06/07*	...	...	N/A	...	...	...	N/A	...
NVQs	04/05	...	...	...	...	42	48	50	-2
	05/06	...	...	...	...	25	64	63	1
	06/07*	1	100	N/A	...	48	75	N/A	...
Other	04/05	25	80	72	8	107	64	56	8
	05/06	204	74	75	-1	129	71	62	9
	06/07*	302	74	N/A		97	89	N/A	

* college data (validated and produced using proprietary software)