

Connell Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates

15–17 January 2018

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors provide very effective support and challenge to leaders and managers which has resulted in the standard of education and training being good.
- Leaders and managers have successfully set high expectations for teachers and staff resulting in students making good progress in their studies.
- Leaders and managers have implemented a strong and inclusive culture of learning in which students from diverse backgrounds work successfully with each other to embody the college values of hard work, integrity and passion, trust and respect.
- Teachers plan lessons meticulously and they ensure that students make good progress throughout their time at the college.
- Teachers assess students' progress accurately and regularly through a comprehensive progress-review system and provide useful feedback that helps them to improve.
- Students have access to effective and impartial careers information, advice and guidance which has led to almost all students progressing to higher education, apprenticeships or employment.
- Newly implemented vocational courses do not perform as well as the more established ones.
- While the principal and her senior managers have worked tirelessly to increase the student numbers at the college, the future sustainability of the college depends on transferring it to another multi-academy trust.
- The quality improvement plan is not specific enough to enable managers to make further improvements.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The college is part of the Bright Futures Educational Trust, a chain of academies in the north west of England. The college opened in September 2013 with a small cohort of students. It relocated to purpose-built premises in September 2014. The college was established to provide high-quality academic provision for young people in east Manchester. The curriculum includes BTEC qualifications in business, health and social care, and sport at levels 2 and 3 in addition to A levels in humanities and science. Currently the college has 407 students on roll. In addition, it also provides academic programmes for scholars at Manchester City Football Club who are funded by the football club.
- Approximately 541,000 people live in the local authority of Manchester. The proportion of students achieving GCSEs in English and mathematics at grades 9 to 4 are below the national rates. According to data from the Office of National Statistics for 2017, levels of unemployment are significantly higher in Manchester than in the north west as a whole. They are currently 6.6%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Managers should ensure that the standard of education and training in newly implemented vocational programmes is as rigorous as it is in the more established courses. They should do this by:
 - ensuring that students' starting points are clearly identified and teachers use this information to plan programmes that will challenge students to achieve their potential
 - providing purposeful and regular feedback to students to help them to extend their knowledge and develop new skills to assist them in making good progress in their studies.
- Leaders and managers should improve the financial stability of the college.
- Leaders, governors and managers should set clear and specific actions in the quality improvement plan to enable them to evaluate continually the progress they make.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have worked hard to promote a culture of high expectations throughout the college. The principal has been instrumental in driving substantial improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment which are now good.
- Leaders and managers deal very effectively with underperforming courses. They use the results of lesson observations and work scrutiny diligently to identify accurately which aspects of teachers' practices need to improve. Leaders and managers support them to become better teachers. When teachers do not improve they leave the college.
- Leaders and managers complete effective pre-contract checks with the only subcontractor who delivers qualifications in sport. Teachers who work for the subcontractor are subjected to the same quality-assurance arrangements that apply to college staff such as staff reviews, student-progress monitoring and observations of teaching, learning and assessment. The large majority of current students make good progress on their vocational courses.
- Leaders and managers have introduced strategies that have successfully improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the college. They regularly complete student, subject and teacher performance reviews which have improved the proportion of students who make at least good progress on their course.
- Leaders and managers have developed an effective strategy to improve students' English and mathematical skills. Students develop their oracy, reading and communication skills in lessons successfully. They are guided skilfully onto the most appropriate mathematics or statistics A level, depending on their chosen career or subject combination. For example, social science students have benefited from studying statistics to develop further their analytical skills in preparation for their examinations in the second year. A small minority of vocational students take the opportunity to study a core-mathematics qualification in addition to their main programme of study.
- Governors, leaders and managers have developed and refined the programmes of study very effectively to respond to local and regional skills priorities. This enables students to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to progress successfully to employment. Recently leaders and managers have developed health and social care courses at levels 2 and 3 to meet the specific skills shortages in the region. They also work closely with a local premier-league football team to offer vocational sports courses at level 3 that meet their priorities of education, health and inclusion for the communities of east Manchester.
- Students receive good independent careers information, advice and guidance that inspire and motivate them. They participate enthusiastically in local initiatives that enable them to experience their chosen career through direct experience. They also appreciate greatly the opportunities they have to take part in summer internships in a range of construction companies as well as in local hospitals and financial institutions. Consequently, students are prepared well for their next steps. Almost all students progress to higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

- Staff promote the importance of diversity very successfully and students demonstrate mutual respect and tolerance towards each other and to their teachers. Activities and events enable students to gain a broad understanding of their expected responsibilities and contributions to society. For example, students volunteer to take part in Greater Manchester Police skills-development exercise days. They gain an understanding of how police officers are trained to deal with suspected criminals and crime-related situations by participating in staged scenarios as victims, witnesses or even the accused. These activities demonstrate very meaningfully to students the importance of respect, tolerance and the rule of law in the community. They become very familiar with British values.
- Governors, leaders and managers have successfully identified the strengths and weaknesses through their most recent self-assessment activities. They have a clear understanding of the improvements that need to be made, which are detailed in the quality improvement plan. However, the targets for improvement are not sufficiently specific to allow managers to evaluate the success of their actions.
- While the principal and the senior management team have worked tirelessly to increase the student numbers in order to improve the financial sustainability of the college, the sustainability is reliant on the successful transfer to another multi-academy trust.

The governance of the provider

- Governance of the college is highly effective. Governors challenge leaders and managers rigorously while supporting them very effectively. The principal provides regular and comprehensive progress reports which governors scrutinise and monitor thoroughly. They identify areas of concern and intervene swiftly, leading to rapid improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Governors' knowledge of the college is very good and they understand its strengths and weaknesses. They are highly motivated and are committed to ensuring that the students are successful.
- Governors contribute to setting the strategic direction of the college and support the leadership team fully in pursuing ambitious plans for the future. Although they are involved in the future plans for the college, they remain focused on the students' outcomes and experiences.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding receives the highest priority. They have developed and refined safeguarding policies which are enforced by appropriately trained members of staff. Students have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and the potential dangers of the internet and social media, which are effectively dealt with at induction and reinforced in tutorials throughout the academic year.
- The designated safeguarding officer has developed effective working relationships with external agencies in the local area. This enables him to identify risks and dangers in the local area and put appropriate safeguards in place to protect students.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations of their students and they plan lessons meticulously to support students to achieve their potential. They work skilfully to establish effective and purposeful learning environments which students greatly appreciate. Teachers make good use of their assessments of students' starting points and the ongoing performance information to ensure that they make good progress throughout their studies.
- Teachers explain pertinent theoretical and practical concepts clearly and use very effective questioning techniques skilfully to check learning and develop students' further understanding. Many teachers use a variety of short exercises and discussion topics, often based on previous examination questions, to enable students to practise and extend their knowledge and skills. Consequently, the large majority of students make good progress in lessons and on their courses. Students studying GCSE English can explain in detail the importance of similes and metaphors in the creation of stories and align this knowledge with the criteria required for a grade 5 in their examination at the end of the year.
- Teachers make extensive use of information technology, using resources such as interactive whiteboards and videos, to enhance and illustrate the content of lessons graphically and to develop students' digital skills. Teachers present information in a lively manner which helps to maintain students' interest and motivation in lessons. For example, in an A-level biology lesson the teacher used an interactive whiteboard to display different chromosome patterns in human reproduction and then asked students to model possible variations in genetic outcomes using pipe cleaners.
- Students take an active part in lessons and enjoy learning from each other as well as from the teachers. They are enthusiastic about their learning and they welcome their peers' comments when considering key concepts. For example, in an English language A-level lesson students worked enthusiastically in groups to analyse the language used and the content of the college's current mission statement and its expectations about students' behaviour, rights and responsibilities. This was compared to a 19th-century equivalent document from an American college. Students reported their findings in detail to each other and reflected on the different views expressed in the two documents and the cultural changes that have taken place in the intervening period.
- Teachers often use contemporary examples to contextualise students' learning and help to bring it to life. This assists students to apply their understanding to examples in the real world. For example, A-level religious-studies students analysed comments made by a world leader about people from other countries from the viewpoint of different theories of religious belief, while A-level economics students considered the impact of the recent collapse of a major company responsible for public-sector contracts.
- Teachers extend and develop students' oral and written communication skills in lessons. They pay careful attention to correcting spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in students' written work. They challenge students to complete documents to the standard expected in their future careers. As a result, students develop confidence and make good progress in producing work of a high quality and improving their literacy skills.
- Students' progress is assessed on a regular basis through the use of a comprehensive and effective progress-review system. Teachers regularly check students' learning in lessons through a variety of techniques including questioning and peer assessment. They provide

detailed and specific feedback to help students improve their work. In A-level sociology, students are provided with a single sheet aimed at improving their sociological literacy. It uses clever mnemonics to assist students to remember important essay writing requirements such as the need for good conclusions and consideration of class, age, gender and ethnicity – ‘cage’. Furthermore, the college’s ‘green pen’ initiative encourages students systematically to add additional commentary and corrections to their previously assessed work to develop their learning further.

- Support for students is good. It helps them to maintain interest in their studies and gain their qualifications. All students are allocated a progress tutor who monitors all aspects of their performance on a regular basis. Intervention classes help students who are not making the progress they should in their studies to gain additional help and support to help them catch up and make good progress.
- Students who have special educational needs and those in receipt of high-needs funding receive effective support from staff, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers identify the specific needs of these students prior to and during enrolment. This allows staff to make sure that these students have a smooth and effective transition into college. As a result, the large majority of them make the good progress that is expected.
- Teachers are aware of the needs of a culturally diverse student population. They handle potentially challenging topics, such as discussions of different cultural practices and religious beliefs, skilfully and in a sensitive and inclusive manner.
- Students review their progress on a regular basis. However, the targets for improvement that they set themselves often lack clarity and are not specific enough to be easily measured and reviewed.
- Not all teachers set work for students that is sufficiently demanding. In a small number of lessons, teachers answer their own questions and do not check what students have learned. As a consequence, students’ knowledge and understanding are not sufficiently extended to enable them to gain a deeper insight into the subjects they are studying.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Students are polite and treat each other and members of staff with respect. They take pride in their work, improve their confidence and develop the knowledge and skills required for further study or employment.
- Leaders have nurtured a strong culture of ‘learning together’ and students are proud to identify themselves as Connell students. Students from diverse backgrounds work very effectively together and listen respectfully to each other’s views and opinions. Their behaviour is very good. Consequently, this leads to the college being a very efficient and harmonious learning environment which students appreciate greatly.
- Students benefit from having access to very effective and impartial careers advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about their future options. They are supported very effectively when completing their university applications and visiting local universities. While the vast majority of students progress to higher education, leaders, managers and teachers have used their extensive industrial contacts to ensure that those students who wish to progress to employment or apprenticeships receive the same level of support, resulting in them achieving their personal goals.

- Students develop good personal, social and employability skills through regular tutorial sessions, carefully planned work placements and opportunities to take part in innovative external activities such as the 'career ready' programme. This programme provides students with good opportunities to benefit from a personal professional mentor from the sector they are studying, targeted opportunities for internships and focused support for writing personal statements and curricula vitae.
- Students enhance their studies by taking part in a number of sporting and cultural activities. For example, history, sociology and psychology students enthuse about their visit to Berlin, which has allowed them to contextualise a lot of the knowledge they have gained. Other students gain additional skills and qualifications, for example by taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award scheme which helps them to develop new skills such as budgeting, team building and resilience.
- Students feel safe and understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. They are also acutely aware of the dangers of the internet and social media and know how to safeguard themselves when using them. Students realise the importance of raising any concerns and know to whom in the college they should report their anxieties.
- While overall attendance at college is good, attendance and punctuality in a small minority of sessions is not good enough. Leaders and managers have introduced an effective system that requires students with low attendance or poor punctuality to attend intervention sessions.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Most students on courses make the progress expected, given their entry qualifications. In 2016/17, college data indicates that the proportion of students who made at least the expected progress improved significantly on A-level courses and was very good. High-performing subjects included chemistry, biology, mathematics, psychology and sociology.
- In 2016/17, college data indicates that vocational students at level 3 made good progress in their studies from when they started their course. High-performing subjects included the extended diploma in science and the extended diploma in sport and exercise. Conversely, students on the newly implemented courses, such as the diploma in business, are not making the progress of which they are capable. Leaders have acknowledged that business studies is a cause for concern and have realigned management responsibilities to deal with this poor performance.
- The proportion of students who achieve A* to C in their A levels has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now good. GCSE English language has also improved significantly, with more than three quarters of the students achieving grades A* to C. GCSE mathematics has seen more modest improvements with around half of students attaining an A* to C.
- The large majority of current students are making at least the progress of which they are capable. For those students who do not make the progress expected of them, the college has implemented a range of successful intervention strategies to get them back on track. These strategies were very successful in 2016/17, resulting in A-level students making very good progress.
- Leaders' and managers' actions to reduce the gaps in achievement between different

groups of students has been largely successful. Data provided by the college suggests that teachers are particularly adept at meeting the needs of those students who have previously received free school meals and are in receipt of a bursary. Students in these groups are making very good progress in relation to their starting points. While students who complete vocational qualifications make good progress, their progress is less impressive than their A-level peers. Leaders have a specific improvement plan in place to deal with these gaps.

- The vast majority of students progress to their next steps, as planned. Most students progress to higher education with around one in five progressing to full-time employment or an apprenticeship.
- Leaders have been successful in developing programmes of study which are planned to meet the skills requirements of the local economy. Around one third of all leavers in 2016/17 progressed into higher education or employment in engineering, health sciences, mathematics, science, and technology, which are regional skills priorities.
- Students produce work of a good standard. They strive to improve the standard and achieve higher grades following the detailed feedback they receive from their teachers.

Provider details

Unique reference number	139730
Type of provider	Sixth form college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	658
Principal	Jane Hopcroft
Telephone number	0161 231 9200
Website	www.connellsixthformcollege.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	28	-	365	14	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	TVS Education Limited							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant principal, curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the college.

Inspection team

Paul Cocker, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alison Cameron Brandwood	Her Majesty's Inspector
Philip Pullen	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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