

South Downs College

Inspection report

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Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8

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 achievements 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. South Downs College is the largest further education college in Hampshire, situated just north of Portsmouth. The college has seen significant growth in learner enrolments over the past four years. In 2006/07 there were over 5,000 full-time learners, most of whom were aged 16 to 18, and around 7,500 part-time learners. Courses, both full and part time, are offered in all sector subject areas except construction. Over half the enrolments in 2006/07 were on courses at entry level, level 1 and level 2. The proportion of learners studying at the college from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly in line with the local population. South Downs has two centres of vocational excellence (CoVE), in mental health and learning disabilities and in early years, play work and children's services. South East Hampshire has pockets of deprivation in Portsmouth and Havant, along with suburban communities and

areas of more rural character. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results at age 16 in the college's partner schools are below the national average. The college mission focuses on increasing participation and broadening access to lifelong education in addition to the pursuit of excellence and parity of esteem for all.

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. The overall effectiveness of provision is outstanding. South Downs is a highly effective college. Learners' success rates are high and have consistently improved over the past three years. Pass rates on advanced courses are very good, as are learners' achievements on vocational programmes at all levels. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college is highly inclusive and effectively meets the education and training needs of the communities it serves. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. It provides a wide variety of learning programmes from pre-entry level to advanced level and beyond. Teaching and learning are outstanding and quality assurance arrangements have brought about demonstrable improvements in the standard of teaching. Guidance and support for learners are also outstanding and additional learning support very well organised. Leadership and management, including provision for equality of opportunity, are outstanding. Accommodation is excellent and specialist resources for learning are very good. Self-assessment is very thorough and realistic targets for improvement are set and met each year. The college is in a strong financial position.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

3. The college's capacity to improve is outstanding. Consistent improvements to learners' success rates and to the quality of teaching and learning are evidence of its capacity to continue to develop and improve performance. Quality assurance is fully understood throughout the college and results in realistic team assessments and targets for improvement. Management information is accurate and used effectively to inform developments. Managers have a very good understanding of the college's key strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found the college self-assessment report and its related action plans to be accurate and highly evaluative.

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

4. The effectiveness of steps taken to improve is outstanding. Very good progress has been made in improving the areas for development identified at the last inspection. Learner performance data are now routinely analysed by ethnicity and gender and learners' attendance at key skills lessons has improved. The college information and learning technology (ILT) strategy has been effectively implemented and ILT is much more integrated into teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- outstanding success rates that have continued to improve
- excellent pass rates
- much outstanding and inspiring teaching
- exemplary teaching resources and accommodation
- outstanding advice and guidance for learners
- excellent additional learning support
- outstanding leadership and management across the college
- excellent quality assurance that has improved outcomes for learners
- the college's very strong financial position
- thorough lesson observation system that leads to improvement
- excellent governance.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- learners' modest participation rates for enrichment activities
- the introduction of government funded work based learning programmes.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Success, pass and retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and for adult learners have continued to improve at all levels over the past four years. Early analysis of the 2006/07 examination results shows that overall success rates are at least 8 percentage points above national averages for similar colleges, at levels 1, 2 and 3. For example, in 2007, learners taking the BTEC first courses achieved a 95% pass rate and over half of these courses had 100% pass rates. On foundation for learning courses there was an overall 83% pass rate and half had 100% pass rates. General certificate of education (GCE) A level courses, a significant part of the full-time college provision, had a 99.1% pass rate with 38% at A and B grades. The AS pass rate was 94% with 33% at A and B grades.
6. Retention rates have improved over the past three years and are generally good. However, the college recognises in its self-assessment that there are a minority of courses where retention rates are below national average. Retention on key skills was outstanding at 97% in 2007 and achievement improved to above the national average. Over the past three years learners achieved results at or above those predicted by their prior attainment.
7. Attendance has improved and was 88% in 2006/07, although the college self-assessment report notes some relatively low attendance in a minority of courses.
8. Learners enjoy their studies and gain a wide variety of academic and workplace skills. They use safe practices in a range of college working environments, make significant contributions to the local community and are making good progress in adopting healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Learners have access to excellent resources and specialist facilities. They develop their practical skills well through activities in realistic working environments. Accommodation for teaching and learning is exemplary. The college's observation of teaching and learning is thorough and very effective in identifying areas for improvement. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. Most teaching and learning is good or better, with much that is outstanding. The college has very effective arrangements for promoting excellence in teaching and learning and curriculum champions have improved the use of ILT in lessons. Learners make very good use of the learning resource centre and benefit from the well developed on-line learning resources. Learners' profiles, containing details of initial assessment and learning styles are used by teachers in planning

learning and assessments. Teachers are very thorough in assessing learners' work and give them clear feedback on how they can improve further.

10. Educational and social inclusion and the college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners are outstanding. Learners have access to a very wide range of courses, subjects and levels. As the self-assessment report identifies, the college has very effective links with schools and a very successful, well established programme for learners aged 14 to 16. The college's community learning programme is well-managed. Clear targets for employer engagement have been set and met. Employers' needs are met particularly well through bespoke courses and in the two well managed CoVEs. The college has well developed outreach programmes in local communities. It has yet to develop government funded work based learning. College managers are actively involved in local consortia developing specialist diplomas, due to start in 2009. Learners have access to an extensive enrichment programme which is closely mapped to Every Child Matters (ECM) themes. However, the proportion of full-time learners completing enrichment programmes last year was relatively modest.
11. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. Initial advice and guidance are excellent, thorough and well planned. Learners attend useful introductory events and individual interviews before starting college. Induction is very effective. Learners are fully involved in developing individual learning plans and subsequent action plans. Most learners' action plans are detailed and useful. The college provides very good management and support for tutorials. Links between tutors and teachers are excellent. Learners' progress is monitored very effectively during individual tutorials. Welfare support arrangements are excellent and promote inclusion. Learners receive outstanding careers and higher education guidance and benefit from the college's extensive links with external organisations. The quality of additional learning support is excellent and learning support is well planned to complement programmes of study. All learners receive initial assessment for literacy and numeracy and virtually all those identified as needing support take it up. Additional learning support assistants are highly effective in supporting learners with additional learning needs. Retention rates for learners receiving additional learning support are very high.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grade:
Equality of opportunity*

Outstanding: grade 1

12. Leadership and management are outstanding. Since the last inspection the college has continued to grow, to improve success rates and to develop successful links with other institutions and local businesses. The principal and the senior leadership team provide a very clear direction for the college. Together with the governors, they give a clear vision and strategic direction which is well understood by all staff. Management at all levels is well organised and focused on procedures and changes that will bring about improvements in outcomes for learners. There is a culture of challenge, hard

work and improvement in everything the college undertakes. Management information is exceptionally well used and analysed to monitor performance and raise standards.

13. Quality assurance is a key strength of the college. Target setting in college teams is excellent and quality assurance procedures are mature and robust. Self-assessment at team level is well developed and self-critical; team evaluations are rigorously reviewed and a small number of challenging targets agreed each year. These targets, together with similar targets for cross-college teams are published, monitored and reviewed in a highly effective way. The college has a very good record of target setting and target completion. The result is a quality assurance system that has delivered year on year rises in learners' success rates over the past few years. The annual self-assessment report is an accurate and highly evaluative account of the college's activities and progress.
14. The lesson observation system and the experienced learning mentors who implement it make a significant contribution to the success of the college's learners. The self-assessment report recognises that observations are regular, rigorous and have brought about improvements in the standard of teaching and learning. Mentors are supportive of teachers and are responsible for highly regarded in-service training on pedagogy.
15. College staff are well qualified and a high proportion of both full- and part-time staff have relevant teaching qualifications. Staff development is excellent and college developed in-service training is highly regarded. Measures to ensure the safety, protection and well being of young people at the college are very effective.
16. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. The college is a safe place in which to work and there is an obvious atmosphere of tolerance and respect. Diversity is celebrated throughout the college. Teachers promote equality and diversity in lessons. There are attractive displays and posters and activities such as 'One World Week'. Provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding. The college is fully accessible to those with physical disabilities and the college complies with the legal requirements in relation to race relations, equality and disability. Analysis of equality and diversity related data is good.
17. The governance of the college is outstanding. Well informed governors have high expectations of both learners and staff. They monitor the college's performance effectively, are well briefed and are supported by excellent clerking. Financial management is very good; the college is debt free and over the past twelve years has not borrowed any money whilst completing over thirteen million pounds worth of new buildings.
18. Links with other providers, services and employers are highly effective. The college is actively engaged in widening participation in education and training in the Havant area. It successfully leads two centres of vocational excellence. Over the past three years employer engagement has increased substantially.

The college is a lead partner with the local authority and secondary schools in developing 14 to 19 diplomas and in successfully providing part-time vocational courses for 14 to 16 year olds.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03-04	825	62	61	1	4564	72	59	13
	04-05	827	73	65	8	2782	74	62	12
	05-06	1504	69	69	0	2494	80	65	15
GNVQs	03-04	79	70	65	5	8	100	64	36
	04-05	76	87	68	19	6	100	64	36
	05-06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	03-04	30	77	61	16	48	77	62	15
	04-05	83	80	68	12	37	73	66	7
	05-06	211	79	72	7	45	91	74	17
Other	03-04	716	60	60	0	4508	71	59	12
	04-05	668	70	64	6	2739	74	62	12
	05-06	1293	68	69	-1	2449	80	65	15

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03-04	1563	69	56	13	1403	65	54	11
	04-05	1516	66	61	5	1358	73	60	13
	05-06	1517	74	66	8	1301	74	66	8
GCSEs	03-04	283	59	61	-2	372	54	59	-5
	04-05	269	66	64	2	316	65	63	2
	05-06	340	71	68	3	283	70	67	3
GNVQs	03-04	174	78	63	15	29	48	59	-11
	04-05	162	72	67	5	10	70	75	-5
	05-06	38	79	69	10	3	67	68	-1
NVQs	03-04	215	69	51	18	276	74	53	21
	04-05	229	72	57	15	374	78	60	18
	05-06	282	77	65	12	369	83	67	16
Other	03-04	891	70	54	16	726	68	53	15
	04-05	856	64	61	3	658	75	59	16
	05-06	857	74	66	8	646	71	65	6

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03-04	4340	74	64	10	1372	66	54	12
	04-05	4826	77	68	9	1491	71	58	13
	05-06	5133	80	70	10	1491	71	63	8
A/A2 Levels	03-04	1087	89	84	5	97	59	66	-7
	04-05	1157	90	86	4	81	69	69	0
	05-06	1257	90	87	3	117	80	72	8
AS Levels	03-04	2268	72	63	9	217	56	50	6
	04-05	2553	75	66	9	230	61	52	9
	05-06	2635	78	67	11	180	64	55	9
GNVQs	03-04	313	57	53	4	35	34	45	-11
	04-05	234	62	61	1	12	58	54	4
	05-06	161	70	66	4	11	27	57	-30
NVQs	03-04	64	47	54	-7	361	72	48	24
	04-05	116	66	63	3	521	78	56	22
	05-06	83	75	71	4	550	82	63	19
Other	03-04	608	66	57	9	662	69	56	13
	04-05	766	70	60	10	647	69	59	10
	05-06	997	73	65	8	633	64	64	0