Effectiveness of the sixth form provision: the quality of education provided in the post-16 study programmes

209. Inspectors are required to report a numerical grade for the quality of education provided in the sixth form and write a section in the inspection report that summarises its effectiveness. They must do this by evaluating achievement, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety, and leadership and management. School and academy sixth forms are covered, as is all provision for 16–19-year-old students, by the requirements of the DfE 16–19 study programmes.⁵⁹

210. When inspecting and reporting on students’ achievement in the sixth form, inspectors must take into account all other guidance on judging the achievement, behaviour and development of students, including specific groups such as disabled students, those with special educational needs, those who are disadvantaged⁶⁰ and the most able, and the extent to which achievement gaps are closing and how well provision for them is led and managed, their safety assured and an appropriate curriculum provided.

211. Inspectors will additionally consider:

- whether the school meets the 16-19 interim minimum standards specified by the DfE, including the extent to which those students who do not already have a grade C or above in English and/or mathematics at GCSE are helped to achieve these and progression beyond the sixth form

- how well students' personal, social and employability skills are developed and how well this prepares them for their next steps in education or at work, including the contribution of 'non-qualification' activity and/or work experience and appreciation of how to approach life in modern Britain positively

- the extent to which students are supported to choose the most appropriate courses, taking into account retention and success rates, as well as destination and progression information and students’ views

- the extent to which teaching, including non-qualification activity and the quality of one-to-one and small group tutorial support, leads to all groups of students developing knowledge, understanding and skills, and enables them to make good progress over time

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⁶⁰ In the sixth form, the term 'disadvantaged' applies to looked after children and students who were known to be eligible for free school meals when in Year 11.
- how well teachers monitor, review and assess students’ achievement of challenging targets, take account of each student’s current progress, and provide frequent, detailed and accurate feedback so that students understand how to improve

- how well leaders and managers:
  - ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum and the arrangements to provide well-planned and well-managed individual study programmes,\(^{61}\) including the contribution of partnerships with other providers and employers
  - provide high-quality teaching in English and mathematics so that students that still need to achieve at least grade C in English and/or mathematics or appropriate functional skills or similar qualifications do so
  - ensure that all students are provided with high-quality impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance prior to starting post-16 courses, and about choices following completion of their post-16 study programme
  - use information about the destinations of those leaving the sixth form to check the extent to which provision meets the needs of all groups of students.

212. Inspectors will draw from the range of inspection activities in the overall guidance, and additionally:

- analyse data in the sixth form performance and assessment reports (PANDAs), level 3 value added reports, data dashboard (when introduced), DfE performance tables and other data to identify inspection questions and hypotheses

- check the suitability of the criteria for entry to the sixth form and the impact of these on students’ achievement

- analyse retention rates and students’ achievement and destinations to help determine the extent to which students are following appropriate study programmes

- talk to students to find out:
  - how well individual study programmes meet their expectations, needs and future plans, including for disabled students, those with special educational needs, those who are disadvantaged or the most able

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\(^{61}\) Inspectors should not make judgements about the ‘nature’ of the sixth form. It is up to the school or academy to determine what level and type of qualifications it offers and to set the entry requirements. Inspectors should focus on the outcomes and achievement of students.
- the quality of teaching, other tutorial support and the feedback they receive on progress and next steps
- the development of personal and wider employability skills
- how well teaching helps to develop their skills in English and mathematics
- the quality and impact of any non-qualification activity and/or work experience
- the quality and impartiality of the information, advice and guidance they were given prior to starting their post-16 study programme.
Grade descriptors – effectiveness of sixth form provision: the quality of education provided in the post-16 study programmes

These descriptors should not be used as a checklist. They must be applied adopting a 'best fit' approach that relies on the professional judgement of the inspection team. The exception is that teaching must be outstanding for effectiveness of sixth form provision to be outstanding.

**Outstanding (1)**

- Teaching over time is outstanding and never less than consistently good. It contributes to outstanding learning and achievement, significant growth in knowledge, skills and understanding and excellent attitudes to learning. All groups of pupils make outstanding progress, including disabled learners, those with special educational needs, disadvantaged students and the most able. Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise ensures that the needs of all students are met precisely and, as a result, all groups of students achieve highly. All students follow study programmes that build on their prior achievement and ensure progression to higher levels. Students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment. All students access high quality non-qualification activity or work experience relevant to their study programme. Students in the sixth form make an outstanding contribution to the life of the school.

- The very large majority of students on all study programmes complete their programme. They make substantial and sustained progress. Level 3 value added progress measures and, where appropriate, level 2 achievement in the large majority of subjects, including for those following GCSE courses in English and/or mathematics or functional skills or similar programmes, are above the national rates and no significant subjects (with large entries) are below them.

- Gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students nationally have closed or are closing rapidly.

- The standards of attainment of almost all groups of students, given their starting points, are likely to be at least in line with national rates, with many students attaining above this. In exceptional circumstances, an outstanding grade can be awarded where standards of attainment of some students, given their starting points, are below those of all students nationally, but the gap is closing rapidly because of the progress being made by students currently in the sixth form.

- Students show excellent attitudes to their learning. They make best use of independent study time so that they are very well prepared for lessons and other activities.

- All students are provided with high quality impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance prior to starting post-16 courses and are fully aware of their choices following completion of their post-16 study programme.

- Students have an excellent understanding of the potential risks to their health and well-being and how to manage them.

- Leadership of the sixth form is highly effective.

**Good (2)**

- As a result of teaching that is consistently good over time, students make good progress, including disabled students, those with special educational needs, disadvantaged students and the most able. Teaching makes a strong contribution to students' good learning and achievement, growth in knowledge, understanding and skills, and positive attitudes to learning, including punctuality to lessons and attendance.

- All students follow study programmes that meet their needs. The programmes build on prior achievement, provide clear progression to a higher level of attainment and ensure
that students are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment. All students take part in non-qualification activity or work experience relevant to their study programme. Students participate fully in the life of the school.

- Retention rates are high. Level 3 value added progress measures and, where appropriate level 2 achievement, in the large majority of subjects are at least in line with the national rate and some are above.
- Any gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students nationally are closing.
- All students who do not already have at least a GCSE grade C in English and/or mathematics follow a programme that enables them to achieve this or are following an appropriate functional skills or similar programme. Success rates on these courses are high or improving rapidly.
- The standards of attainment of almost all groups of students, given their starting points and for most subjects, are likely to be at least in line with national rates. A good grade can be awarded where standards of attainment of any group of students, given their starting points, are below those of all students nationally, but the gap is closing over a sustained period.
- The school provides good, impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance prior to starting post-16 courses. Students are aware of their choices following completion of their post-16 study programme.
- Students have a good understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being and how to manage them.
- Leaders of the sixth form maintain good levels of achievement and personal development for all students over a sustained period and/or secure improvement where necessary.

**Requires Improvement (3)**
The sixth form requires improvement because it is not good.

**Inadequate (4)**
The quality of education in the sixth form is likely to be inadequate if any of the following apply.

- Achievement does not meet the current national 16-19 minimum standards. Too few students complete their course successfully or courses do not meet their needs. Students’ progress is inadequate overall or for particular groups, as indicated by the level 3 value added progress measures or achievement in level 2 courses in many subjects being well below national rates.
- Students or specific groups such as disabled students, those with special educational needs, disadvantaged students or the most able do not achieve as well as they can. Low attainment of any group shows little sign of rising.
- The requirements of the 16-19 study programmes are not met. For example, students are on courses that do not allow them to progress to a higher qualification than that already achieved; the requirements for English and mathematics are not met.
- The quality of teaching is inadequate overall or in a number of subjects and/or teachers do not have adequate specialist/subject knowledge.
- Students’ attitudes to learning are poor.
- Students are uninformed and ill-equipped to deal with potential risks to their health and well-being and/or learning and progress.
- Leadership of the sixth form is ineffective.