

Rainford High Technology College

Higher Lane, Rainford, St Helens, Merseyside, WA11 8NY

Inspection dates 17–18 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- In 2014, an above average proportion of students left Rainford with five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics.
- Students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at GCSE are particularly strong, for most groups of students.
- Students' behaviour in and around the college is good. Relationships between all members of the college community are cordial and characterised by mutual respect.
- Teaching is of good quality overall. In most lessons, teachers create a positive climate for learning, have high expectations and plan activities that capture students' imaginations and fuel their desire to learn.
- Students' literacy skills are well developed in a range of subjects.
- The sixth form is good and improving.
- The Principal, ably supported by his senior colleagues and governors, has created a culture of high expectations. As a result, students' achievement, both in the main college and the sixth form is good and improving.
- Senior leaders and governors know the college well. They do not tolerate ineffective teaching and they are eradicating any remaining pockets of weak classroom practice.
- Governors direct the funding they receive through the pupil premium, effectively. As a result, gaps in attainment and progress between disadvantaged students and their peers are not as wide as those nationally and are continuing to close.
- Students with special educational needs and those who are educated off site are well supported and make good progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Across the college, not all teaching is of consistently good to outstanding quality.
- The most able students are not always challenged to think hard, consistently, in all of their lessons.
- At Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, students are not given enough opportunities to demonstrate their mathematical problem-solving skills across the curriculum.
- The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent.
- Senior leaders have not clarified sufficiently, how they are monitoring and evaluating the success of the college improvement plan.
- A few middle leaders have not grasped the opportunity to take responsibility for the leadership and management of their subject areas. As a result, some departments have improved more rapidly than others.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors considered a broad range of evidence in arriving at their judgements on the quality of education provided for Rainford's students. They observed teaching in a broad range of subjects and by many different teachers, from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5. Three lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also joined students at a number of morning registration sessions and attended two assemblies.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal and his senior colleagues, the group of middle leaders who have responsibility for leading and managing the English Baccalaureate subject areas, and a group of classroom teachers.
- Inspectors met with groups of students of different ages and a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body. One inspector also met with a representative of the local authority and the team of staff responsible for coordinating the college experience of those students supported by the pupil premium, including the pupil premium manager.
- The inspection team examined a range of college policies including those relating to safeguarding. They also examined the work in samples of students' books. The college's most up-to-date improvement plan was scrutinised as was senior leaders' evaluation of how well the college is doing and records of students' attainment and progress.
- One member of the inspection team examined the college's behaviour log, the college's attendance data and the record of the checks made, on behalf of governors, on the suitability of staff to work with children and young people.
- Inspectors took into account the 120 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View. The results of the college's survey of parents' opinions, emails and other communications sent directly to the team, by parents, were also considered.

Inspection team

Charles Lowry, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector
Clive Hurren	Additional Inspector
Jonathan Jones	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rainford High Technology College is a larger than average size comprehensive school which is located in Rainford, Merseyside about five miles to the north-west of St. Helens town centre.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding to support the education of students eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is below average.
- Most students are of White British heritage and very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is below average.
- In 2014, the college met the government's current floor standards; these are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students receive part of their education off site at St. Helens Launch Pad, St. Helens; Napier Street Inclusion Base, St. Helen's and Corner Stone, Liverpool.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching across the college, including the sixth form by:
 - making sure that all teachers replicate the practice of the best by ensuring that learning activities are closely matched to the needs of all learners, fuelling their desire for knowledge and encouraging consistently positive attitudes to learning
 - ensuring that teachers provide even more opportunities to challenge the most able students in order to build their confidence and spur them on to find things out for themselves
 - maximising opportunities for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 to apply their mathematical problem-solving skills in a range of different contexts
 - bringing all marking in the college up to the standard of the best, by clarifying for students what they have done well, what they need to do to make their work even better and then making sure that students act on this advice.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that in the improvement plan senior leaders clarify the strategies for monitoring and evaluating the actions being taken to improve the college
 - continuing to develop the skills of middle leaders so that all are operating at the level of the best, improving their confidence so that they are able to take the initiative and play a more active role in improving their departments and, ultimately, the college.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The leadership, vision, drive and determination of the principal, ably supported by his colleagues on the senior leadership team, are central to the improvements that have been made at the college since the previous inspection. As a result, students' attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 are good and improving. The gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers are closing and students with special educational needs achieve well.
- Senior leaders are creating a culture of high expectations. This, coupled with their ambitious vision to form students into well-rounded individuals, is making a significant contribution to students' readiness for the next stage in their life's journey.
- The staff and governors know the college well and senior leaders' evaluation of how well the college is doing is accurate. This self-evaluation is used to identify the college's improvement priorities in the college development plan. However, the latter is not sharp enough. For example, it is not clear in the plan how the actions being taken by individuals to improve the college are being monitored or how the impact of these actions is evaluated.
- Since the previous inspection, middle leaders have undergone an extensive programme of training to enable them to take greater responsibility for the quality of teachers' professional practice in their subject areas. This training is also bringing much needed consistency to the judgements made by middle leaders on the features of effective teaching and learning. However, the degree by which middle leaders exercise their responsibilities for leading and managing their departments is inconsistent. Some middle leaders rely too heavily on senior colleagues to direct their work. Consequently, improvements in some departments, for example the quality of teaching in science, have not been as rapid as they have in others, for example, English.
- Senior leaders are taking effective action to build on the wealth of good classroom practice in the college to improve teaching and learning. The outstanding teacher programme, leading to chartered teacher status for those teachers who excel on the course, is enabling senior leaders to capitalise on this group's skills and expertise to help develop other teachers' practice. This strategy is leading to improved classroom performance across the college. However, senior leaders acknowledge that, although teaching is improving and is now consistently good in most subjects, including English and mathematics, more work needs to be done to bring all teachers' practice up to the standard of the best so that it is never less than consistently good in all subjects.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is broad and balanced. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is compliant with National Curriculum requirements. Further, senior leaders are ensuring that there is a cross-curriculum focus on developing students' literacy skills. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is predominantly academic in nature with a few vocational options, tailored to meet individual students' needs. This curriculum offer ensures that students have a wide-ranging experience pre-16 to prepare them well for the next stage.
- The college's careers advice and guidance programme is comprehensive. The programme starts in Year 8 and prepares students effectively for making informed choices about their GCSE options at Key Stage 4. The programme then continues through to Year 13 so that students can consider the range of opportunities open to them when they leave.
- The personal, health, social and sex education (P.H.S.S.E) programme has the unifying threads of equality of opportunities, tackling discrimination and acceptance of difference. The impact of this programme is reflected in the harmonious relationships between all members of the college community. This aspect of the curriculum also enables students to reflect on key issues such as the Holocaust and capital punishment; how to stay safe, including when using the internet; management of personal finances and interpersonal relationships. The PHSSE course, coupled with the college's extensive extra-curricular sport and enrichment programme, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development including their understanding of the opportunities and challenges of life in modern Britain.
- Senior leaders ensure that the attendance, behaviour and progress of students who receive some or all of their education other than on the main school site are rigorously monitored. This enables senior leaders to keep a close eye on these students, making sure they are safe and that the provision for them is appropriate.
- The college staff's links with parents are good. The large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreeing that the college responds well to any concerns that they raise.

- The governors have used some of the additional finance the college receives through the pupil premium to fund the post of pupil premium manager who is part of a team of colleagues working effectively to maximise the outcomes for this group of students. As a result, the attendance of this group is improving and the gap in attainment, at GCSE, between disadvantaged students and their peers in college is much narrower than that nationally.
- The local authority has provided effective support to senior leaders and governors in their work to improve the college. This support has included staff training in the use of data, the provision of additional funding for revision classes at Key Stage 4 and linking the college with a local successful school to share good practice.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly effective. They provide an appropriate balance between supporting senior leaders in their work to improve the college and holding them to account for students' outcomes. They have supported the principal's drive to improve the quality of teaching and the robust action he is continuing to take to eliminate the remaining pockets of weaker classroom practice. Consequently, they have a secure understanding of the quality of teaching in the college and its impact on students' outcomes. They have ensured that performance management is rigorous and that teachers' pay progression is linked to their achievement of challenging appraisal targets. In order to hone their skills and expertise further, governors have attended recent training in 'Towards outstanding governance'. As a result of this training, they have restructured their committees so that safeguarding, inclusion and the promotion of British values are closely monitored to ensure that, where appropriate, they meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students behave in a mature and responsible manner. They are welcoming of visitors, polite to each other and show respect for their teachers. As a result, the atmosphere in the college is calm and purposeful.
- Where the quality of teaching is at least good, students make a strong contribution to their own learning and are keen to do well. However, on those few occasions where teaching fails to capture their imaginations some students become bored and engage in low level off-task behaviour. Nevertheless, teachers' consistent application of the college's behaviour policy minimises the impact of this behaviour on students' learning.
- Senior leaders analyse patterns of behaviour carefully. This enables them to identify quickly those students whose conduct gives cause for concern and to target appropriate help. As a result, the college's behaviour log indicates that over the past year incidents of poor behaviour have fallen, with a concurrent rise in rewards.
- The college reports that the behaviour of students who attend off-site provision is good.
- Students are proud to be members of the college and enjoy coming to college every day. This is reflected in their above average attendance and low rates of persistent absence. Students' uniform standards are high and they display respect for the college site, which is clean, bright and litter and graffiti free.
- Those students who spoke with inspectors expressed the opinion that behaviour around college is generally good and most parents who responded to Parent View agree.

Safety

- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Governors' arrangements for keeping students safe, both in college and off-site are effective.
- In their meetings with inspectors, students spoke knowledgeably about the different forms that bullying can take including, racist, homophobic and other forms of prejudice-based behaviour. Although on occasion students can be unkind to each other, students say that their teachers deal with this type of behaviour effectively.
- The college does not tolerate discriminatory and derogatory language. College staff consider this to be a form of bullying, undermining the college's work to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination. They take robust and effective action should it occur.
- The college staff have recently received training in the 'Prevent' strategy to tackle radicalisation and extremist behaviour and, as a result, are aware of the tell-tale signs that may indicate a student is being manipulated to behave in a way that is anathema to modern British values.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time in most subjects is at least good and students achieve well.
- Where teaching is most effective teachers create a positive climate for learning. Students are well supported and receive appropriate guidance from their teachers and teaching assistants to help them understand the work and move their learning forward.
- In the best lessons, teachers plan learning activities that capture students' imaginations and, as a result, students' display strong attitudes to learning, work cooperatively and challenge each other to achieve their best. Teachers employ skilful questioning techniques, that make students think hard about the ideas they are studying and so deepen their understanding. However, this good practice is not consistent throughout the college.
- Senior leaders have established clear systems to assess students' progress. This enables teachers to use data on students' performance to plan learning tasks that meet most students' needs, address any misunderstandings and identify, quickly, those students who are under-achieving and put in place extra help to get them back on track.
- In response to the GCSE results in 2014, senior leaders have increased the focus on meeting the needs of low ability students. The college's data and inspection evidence indicate that increased support in lessons and closely targeted extra classes for this group of students are accelerating their progress.
- Although outcomes for the most able students, at the end of Key Stage 4 last year, were at least good on a whole host of measures, the scrutiny of the work in their books and observations of their classroom experience indicate that they are not always suitably challenged by their teachers. For example, some activities students are given to do are not stretching enough, with teachers occasionally missing opportunities to make the most able apply what they have learned and test their understanding. In these circumstances, this group's progress is not as rapid as it could be.
- In a number of subjects, for example, art, English, design technology, information technology and history, students' literacy skills are being effectively developed. Students' use subject-specific language appropriately and have opportunities to write at length.
- Opportunities for students to develop their mathematical skills outside of dedicated mathematics lessons are evident in science and technology. However, there are not enough opportunities for students to demonstrate their mathematical problem-solving skills in other subjects.
- Since the previous inspection senior leaders have implemented a policy to improve the quality of teachers' marking, which is bearing fruit. Scrutiny of students' books reveals that teachers regularly review students' work. In the best examples, teachers' marking is diagnostic, identifying the strengths in a piece of work and providing students with advice on how the work could be made even better, which the students then act on. Inspectors saw examples of marking of this quality in English and Spanish where it is having a positive impact on students' progress. However, all marking is not yet of this standard and there are examples of marking that is unhelpful.
- College leaders have directed the additional funding the college receives from the Year 7 catch-up premium, effectively, to improve the reading skills of the few students who were below Level 4 when they left primary school.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In 2014, the proportion of students leaving the college with five high grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was significantly above average.
- The gaps in attainment between boys and girls, and disadvantaged students and other students in the college, were not as wide as those of their respective peer groups across the country, with all four groups attaining above national averages in a range of subjects. Consequently, students were very well prepared for the next stage and the range of opportunities open to them at the end of Key Stage 4.
- The proportion of students making expected and more than expected progress in English was significantly above average in 2014, with almost all groups of students making better progress than their equivalent peer groups nationwide. Such was the strength of achievement in English last year, that the progress of disadvantaged students matched that of their peers in the college. Further, they left Rainford about one third of a GCSE grade ahead of other students nationally. However, as a result of their lower starting points, the attainment of disadvantaged students was just under half of one grade behind their peers in the college. Nonetheless, this still represents admirable achievement.
- Similarly in mathematics, students' progress was significantly above average in 2014, with middle ability

students and the most able, in particular, achieving well. Given these groups' starting points, this represents good achievement. However, the progress made by low ability students and the disadvantaged was not as strong. Consequently, in mathematics disadvantaged students left the college about one GCSE grade behind their peers nationwide and just over one and a half grades behind their peers in the college. Senior leaders are taking effective steps to address this short-fall in the attainment and progress of these two groups in mathematics, channelling pupil premium funding into initiatives to improve disadvantaged students' performance. Further, they no longer enter some students early for the GCSE in this subject and as a result, are maximising teaching time in mathematics in their quest to drive up standards even further. Consequently, gaps in attainment are closing and the progress of both groups of students is now good.

- The college's data are indicating that students at Key Stage 3 are making progress, which is at least in line with previous years and, as a result, they have a firm foundation on which to build their studies at Key Stage 4.
- Students are set challenging targets in each of their subjects based upon their level of capability when they entered the college, in Year 7. Students' progress against these targets is assessed each half-term and this information is then supplied to parents. Consequently, students' achievement is viewed as a joint enterprise between home and college, with the college's high expectations for students' attainment and progress being shared with parents. Most parents who expressed an opinion, believe that their child is making good progress at Rainford; inspectors agree.
- Disabled students and those students with special educational needs are well supported and, as a result, are making good progress against their targets.
- The attainment and progress of students who receive their education off-site in either in St. Helens or Liverpool are carefully monitored by college staff. College data indicates that students in this group are attaining in line with their challenging targets and as a result, are making good progress.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The college sixth form is on a journey of improvement and continues to get better.
- In 2014, A-level and AS-level results were broadly average but with some inconsistencies in performance between subjects, reflecting inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, almost all students successfully completed their courses at A-level with an improving proportion of students achieving at the higher *A-B grades. As a result, virtually all students were able to move onto the next stage successfully and realise their higher education or career ambitions.
- Currently, students' attainment and progress in the sixth form are on an improving trend and college data are indicating that examination results in 2015 are likely to be an improvement on the previous year. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- The sixth form curriculum is good. The college offers a wide range of academic qualifications post-16, supplemented by an increasing variety of vocational courses. Student numbers are increasing and senior leaders are working hard to match students' needs and aspirations to suitable courses. This is to enable more students who want to remain at Rainford, at the end of Key Stage 4, to do so, with the intention that they will have a realistic expectation of success.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Following senior leaders' and governors' decision to restructure the sixth form leadership team, the latter are taking decisive action to strengthen provision for post-16 students. This action is based on an accurate understanding of the sixth form's strengths and areas for development. These have resulted in well-conceived plans for broadening the curriculum and increasing recruitment.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their studies and are keen to succeed. Improved progress tracking arrangements, which are consistent with the rest of the college, ensure that students' progress is regularly checked and well-targeted help given to those students who are identified as under-achieving. As a result, students' academic performance is strengthening.
- Students show pride in their membership of the sixth form. Those students spoken to by inspectors said that the checks that staff make on their attendance and progress are fair and in their best interests. Students value highly their good relationships with staff which contribute to a productive learning experience.
- Students willingly involve themselves in the life and work of the college. For example, they serve on the sixth form council, which enables students to have a say in the way the college is run. They also help younger students overcome obstacles to their learning and, as a result, enable them to make progress. These additional opportunities enable students to gain in stature as they move through the sixth form and leave as confident, articulate and responsible young people.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	104826
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	463080

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,459
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Gill
Headteacher	Ian Young
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2014
Telephone number	01744 885914
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