

Longley Park Sixth Form College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth Form College

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Longley Park Sixth Form College opened in September 2004. Situated in north-east Sheffield, the college was established as part of a strategy to raise participation and attainment in an area that has significant educational, social and economic challenges. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is well below average in the local area.

Alongside a broad range of A levels and a modest GCSE re-sit programme, the college offers vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The large majority of students aged 16 to 18 follow courses at advanced level.

The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is representative of the local area. In 2009/10, the proportion of students declaring themselves to be from a background other than White British was 47%.

The last full inspection took place in March 2009. Overall effectiveness, achievement and standards, and leadership and management were judged satisfactory. Capacity to improve and quality of provision were good. Equality of opportunity was outstanding.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college leadership made in improving its self-assessment and improvement planning, and what impact do these have on students? Insufficient progress

Revised systems for self-assessment are fully embedded and have ensured that all staff are fully involved in the process of evaluating the college's work. Each course team is involved in completing a review of performance against a common set of criteria. Although course teams are increasingly confident in assessing performance, many reviews are insufficiently incisive; some strengths are overstated and sometimes weaknesses are not given sufficient weight. Action plans vary in quality; in some areas they are sharply focused and have resulted in rapid improvements. In other areas, plans lack precision and do not clearly identify how actions will bring about improvements in students' learning and achievement. Reviews do not fully evaluate the common strengths or areas for improvement in teaching and learning that are identified through the observation of lessons.

After peer moderation and directorate team validation, the reviews are collated and an overall report for each of the college directorates is produced. However, the links between the directorate reviews and the college summary self-assessment report are unclear. Aspects of the summary self-assessment report are insufficiently self-critical and evaluative. As in the course reviews, insufficient reference is made to the

characteristics of teaching and learning found in the college, and action plans therefore do not identify actions to improve the quality of students' learning.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in improving outcomes for students? Reasonable progress

Data provided by the college for 2009/10 indicate that success rates have continued to increase steadily for most qualifications since the last inspection. At A level, success rates are now good when compared with similar colleges. Rates at AS level have increased by seven percentage points since the last inspection, although these remain low overall. The pattern of improvement is marked in some academic subjects including A-level chemistry, physics and media, and in AS physical education and English language and literature. However, inconsistencies remain across the academic provision. In 2009/10 success rates on advanced vocational courses improved to a satisfactory level. Success rates on vocational intermediate and foundation courses are high. The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C at GCSE remained low in 2009/10. However, the most recent in-year modular results for GCSE mathematics indicate an improvement in the proportion of students achieving a high grade.

Value-added data for 2009/10 indicate an improving picture overall. In many A-level subjects and on advanced vocational courses, students make good progress when compared with their prior attainment at GCSE. However, inconsistencies remain, especially at AS level, where too many students do not make the progress they should. The college is aware of this inconsistency and is relentless in its drive to eradicate underperformance.

Has the college maintained or improved the success rates of different groups of learners, including those of minority ethnic heritage? Reasonable progress

The college monitors the performance of different groups of learners well. College data for 2009/10 indicate that for the majority of students aged 16 to 18 from minority ethnic backgrounds, success rates improved slightly from the previous year. For some groups, including those from Bangladeshi and Caribbean backgrounds, improvements have been marked, but for others, including students aged over 19 from minority ethnic backgrounds, success rates declined in 2009/10. The college has analysed the reasons for this and actions are in place to improve performance.

To what extent have the college's actions to improve attendance led to sustained improvement?

Significant progress

Robust monitoring has resulted in improvements in students' attendance. College data for 2009/10 indicate that attendance is high on the majority of courses. The most recent college data show that these improvements are being maintained in the current year.

Quality of provision

What progress is the college making in improving the quality of teaching and learning? To what extent do the outcomes of lesson observations link to the professional development of teachers?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, teaching was judged as good overall, with well-managed arrangements to assure the quality of teaching. In a few of the curriculum areas inspected, teaching was satisfactory. The college has introduced a range of measures to rectify this. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning have been strengthened further. For example, formal lesson observations, conducted by senior managers and other trained staff, are combined with more informal peer observations and shorter 'walk-through' observations focusing on a particular theme. A more rigorous process to moderate judgements is in place. Outcomes from individual lesson observations are linked closely to professional development and performance management reviews. Regular opportunities exist for staff to share their teaching practice and learning coaches provide effective individual support. The college's own profile for teaching and learning indicates a higher proportion that is good or better compared to that found at the last inspection. However, the college does not analyse systematically the key features of lesson observations in order to identify what it does well and where it needs to improve.

How much progress has the college made in improving the arrangements for students to develop their skills in language, literacy and numeracy?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, very few staff teaching literacy and numeracy had basic skills qualifications. This issue has been remedied and a team of specialist staff are now fully trained and qualified. This team is instrumental in developing a more co-ordinated approach to meeting the wide-ranging literacy and numeracy needs of students. For example, a recent pilot has proved very successful in improving retention and progression rates for a small cohort of foundation-level students identified as needing intensive support. All of the students involved in the pilot stayed on their course and all passed their course in 2009/10. The pilot is now being

rolled out on a much wider scale to other students identified as requiring close specialist support.

Improved use of individual learning plans is helping all students to focus on the need to develop their literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills. Other work involves changing the way specialist staff support curriculum areas to ensure that literacy and numeracy are more fully developed in the classroom. It is too soon to judge the impact of these revised strategies.

Leadership and management

What actions has the college taken to improve the varying quality of curriculum management? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, all curriculum managers work much more collaboratively across the college. Regular, scheduled meetings provide good opportunities to share best practice and to work collectively on college-wide issues such as retention. Managers are encouraged to develop their skills beyond their immediate roles through extensive training. Opportunities for internal progression are good. Curriculum managers are realistic about the many challenges facing the college and feel very well supported in their endeavours to tackle underperformance.

What progress has the college made in developing further its strategy to engage with students and employers to support and promote improvement? Significant progress

The college has worked hard to improve arrangements to engage with students. For example, elected course representatives work alongside the student council to ensure a co-ordinated approach. In addition to online questionnaires, students can communicate their views via the suggestion page on the college intranet. 'You said, we did' boards, located in classrooms and communal areas across the college, are updated regularly. All college strategic groups include student representatives and students participate fully in all staff appointments and governors' meetings.

Insufficient links with employers in some curriculum areas were identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Much has been done since then; the college now works very effectively with a range of employers. This work is underpinned by a comprehensive employer engagement strategy, covering all aspects of college life. Innovations include employer forums, presentations and recruitment events, good opportunities for work placements in non-vocational areas, teaching contributions from employers in curriculum areas and business mentors, including e-mentoring, for students. The college regularly collects employer feedback and is effective in ensuring that they know about any relevant changes to college policies and practices.

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