

Fareham College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Janet Mercer HMI

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Address: Bishopsfield Road
Fareham
Hampshire
PO14 1NH

Telephone number: 01329 815200

REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Fareham College is a small general further education college serving a population of almost 200,000 in the boroughs of Fareham and Gosport. Over 75% of young people in the area stay in education after the age of 16. The college's main focus is on vocational provision. Some 75% of learners are aged 16 to 18. Around half of these learners study at advanced level, with a small proportion of them following AS- and A-level courses. GCSE results on entry to the college are below the national average for similar colleges. Just fewer than 3% of college students are from minority ethnic groups, which is slightly above the ethnic profile of the local community.

At the last full inspection in May 2011, the college's overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management, capacity to improve and equality and diversity were all judged satisfactory. Safeguarding was judged good. Teaching, learning and assessment were satisfactory. Meeting needs and interests, partnership working and care, guidance and support were good.

Three curriculum areas were inspected: hairdressing and beauty therapy were good, health, care and public services satisfactory and performing arts and music inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How well has the college improved the rigour of self-assessment, including subject area self-assessment, and strengthened arrangements for monitoring improvements?

Reasonable progress

The comprehensive college self-assessment report (SAR) for 2010/11 gives an accurate view of college performance. The detailed quality improvement plan clearly identifies areas for improvement and progress is monitored regularly. The analysis of students' achievement is thorough, with careful attention paid to the performance of different groups within the college. However, the section on teaching and learning focuses more on processes and actions taken to secure improvement, rather than evaluating the impact of these actions on raising the quality of teaching across the college.

Course and departmental SARs present achievement data for the most recent year in a consistent format, although performance trends over time are not always clearly evaluated. Despite the college's current focus on improving teaching and learning, with particular regard to increasing the extent of stretch and challenge for students to increase the numbers achieving higher grades, many course and departmental SARs do not fully evaluate the quality of teaching, or include specific actions to improve the extent of challenge to students through lessons and target setting. The system for reviewing course SARs is helping to ensure more consistency in approach

and rigour, and course leaders are held accountable for the performance of their areas.

Outcomes for learners

How well has the college built on improvements in outcomes learners made in 2009/10, and improved outcomes for students on advanced-level courses? **Reasonable progress**

Success rates have continued to improve, with a marked increase of 10 percentage points in long course success rates between 2010 and 2011. The college has successfully narrowed the previously wide variations in success rates between different subject areas. Success rates are now at least in line with national averages in all subject areas and above average in just over half of them. College data indicate that improvements in retention rates noted in 2010/11 are being sustained in the current year.

Although success rates on functional skills improved in 2011, they remain well below national averages overall, with significant variation between different courses. The college has identified administrative errors in enrolments last year and is confident that these issues are now rectified. Too few students taking GCSE English and mathematics achieve grades at C or above. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades dropped sharply in English last year and has been well below average in mathematics for the last two years.

Success rates on vocational advanced-level courses improved by 10 percentage points in 2011 and are in line with national averages. However, despite improvements in AS-level results, success rates remain below national averages and considerable variation remains between different AS-level subjects. Success rates on A-level courses are now close to the national average. The college is aware that, despite some improvements on the previous year, value-added data indicate that advanced-level students do not always make as much progress as expected, compared to their prior attainment, and has identified this as a priority for improvement in the coming year.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in improving the quality of provision and outcomes for students in performing arts and music, which was judged inadequate at the last inspection? **Significant progress**

The college has taken prompt action to remedy weaknesses identified at the last inspection. New managers at faculty and school level are having a positive impact, and students and staff speak very positively about the improvements they have introduced. The restructuring of the course teams, along with the appointment of new teaching staff, has improved team working and internal communications.

Students are benefiting from opportunities for cross-curricular work between performing arts and music, which extends their knowledge and range of skills.

In 2011, success rates improved markedly, and for intermediate and advanced-level courses, are now above national averages. Success rates remain low on entry/foundation level courses, due to some poor success rates in graded music examinations at these levels. Managers have since revised the arrangements for entering students for these qualifications to secure improvements in the current year. Improved advice and guidance and the introduction of auditions as part of the interview process have helped to ensure that students are placed on the appropriate course and level. Retention rates have increased markedly over the last two years.

Significant investment in accommodation and equipment in both performing arts and music has enabled students to benefit from industry-standard facilities and resources. The regular opportunities to work with external creative practitioners, and perform in professional venues, have enhanced students' understanding of employment roles and opportunities in the creative industries.

What progress has the college made in strengthening its systems for evaluating the quality of teaching and assessment to secure improvements in the proportion of good and better lessons?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, the college's lesson observation scheme was not being used systematically to improve learning. Since then, there has been significant progress in strengthening the systems to evaluate and improve teaching and learning. The college now conducts both graded and developmental observations with better follow up on actions for improvement. The smaller team of senior staff conducting graded observations and the involvement of external agencies in joint observations have improved the rigour and consistency of judgements. Heads of department now take increased responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, using their developmental observations to guide individual and departmental improvements. The importance of improving teaching and learning is better recognised at all levels of the college.

Records of observations show an improved emphasis on learning, rather than just teaching. The slight decline in the proportion of good and better lessons compared to the previous year reflects the increased rigour in approach. A new electronic recording system provides a detailed analysis of identified weaknesses, leading to a well-targeted range of college-wide development activities. The college has identified a particular focus on ensuring more challenge for students in lessons and assignments, although it is too early to determine the impact of staff training on this aspect.

How well has the college improved the access to, and use of, information and communication technology (ICT) across the college to support the curriculum and enhance teaching and learning?**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, technology was used effectively in many lessons but limited resources reduced the potential for high-quality learning. The college has invested in new resources, but managers acknowledge that there is still more to do to complete improvements in physical resources and embed the effective use of technology in all subject areas. Some aspects have improved markedly, with staff making good use of innovative ideas to enthuse students. Almost a thousand staff and students are using the recently installed wireless network enabling them to use their own devices when appropriate, or to operate college laptops in any area of the college.

A restructured learning resource centre offers improved space and personal assistance to students. Teaching areas, notably in music, are better equipped with learning technology and software. Relevant staff training and support have improved, although, in a few areas, teachers still use in-class equipment for little more than projecting presentations. Learning plans are now accessible through the virtual learning environment. This enables students to access these more easily and encourages greater familiarity with the system and the growing number of resources available. Staff use the comprehensive online student information system well to identify and support underperforming students.

How much progress has the college made in improving information, advice and guidance for students on advanced-level and work-based learning programmes? How well has the college improved progress reviews for work-based learners and the quality of target setting to help students improve their work?**Reasonable progress**

The college has made reasonable progress in improving information, advice and guidance (IAG), target setting and work-based reviews. Personal learning plan (PLP) targets are now set earlier in the year and greater involvement of students in setting and reviewing targets has made the system more relevant to students. Staff and students make regular use of the electronic PLPs to discuss progress. Initial targets are understandably fairly generic, with a focus on attendance, punctuality and completion of assignments. However, target setting does not always become sufficiently specific as reviews take place. Therefore, targets often remain insufficiently precise to support improvement, and progress towards them cannot be measured easily.

IAG has improved with a sharper focus on students' past performance and potential, particularly at advanced level, and specific ability tests for some courses. The number of early withdrawals or course transfers has reduced this year.

Work-based learning reviews have improved, but inconsistencies remain. Long- and short-term actions and targets are not always clearly defined, and the central system for recording and monitoring reviews is not completely in place, so that the revised approach is not yet fully effective. Employers' routine involvement in reviewing apprentices' progress on college-based training means employers are well informed about their employees' progress.

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