

Prior Pursglove 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

Prior Pursglove College, which is located in the centre of Guisborough, recruits students from the surrounding areas of Redcar, Cleveland and Middlesbrough. The college's core offer is AS- and A-level courses for students aged 16 to 18 who study full time. The range of provision at intermediate and advanced levels has been expanded recently to include vocational programmes. Working in partnership with Askham Bryan College, the college provides agricultural courses. Since the last inspection the college has introduced apprenticeships and foundation level programmes.

In 2010/11 the college enrolled 1,528 full-time and 102 part-time students aged 16 to 18 who followed mostly advanced-level courses. In addition, around 1,000 students aged over 19 were enrolled on mainly part-time courses. Around 60 students were enrolled on apprenticeship programmes.

At the last full inspection in February 2010 outcomes for learners, quality of provision, and leadership and management were judged to be good. Provision in science and mathematics; arts, media and publishing; and languages, literature and culture were also judged to be good. Business, administration and law was judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in embedding the use of data across all areas of the college to set targets and monitor progress? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection the college has extended the range of management information processes and systems, and managers are using these effectively to review the quality of the experience provided for students. Senior managers have good access to online reports on trends in success rates and very good information on students' progress against their targets. They are using these data to set targets that are establishing higher expectations for staff and students and are increasing levels of accountability for improving standards. In addition, live reports on retention, attendance and teachers' use of electronic mark books are being used very effectively by senior managers to help monitor performance.

Managers have developed a system for providing individual teachers with comprehensive data on the progress of the students they teach. This is beginning to be used to increase the rigour of each individual teacher's performance review. The college recognises that many of these processes are in the early stages of

implementation and have not had time to impact fully on success rates and the proportion of high grades students achieve. A-level success rates have been very high for a number of years but managers see the improved use of data as vital in driving a faster rate of improvement at AS level.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for students, especially those on AS-level and intermediate level courses? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection outcomes for learners were judged to be good, but in 2009/10 success rates on long courses declined. The college carried out a thorough analysis of the underlying causes of the decline and has implemented a range of strategies that have been effective in improving success rates, particularly at AS level. In 2010/11 the overall success rate on long courses improved to around the national average for similar colleges.

The curriculum has been revised to provide a wider range of choices in subjects such as mathematics that are providing more appropriate options at both intermediate and advanced levels. Vocational courses in information and communication technology and in business have been introduced to provide employment-related options for students. At intermediate level the curriculum has been revised so that advanced-level students no longer routinely enrol on an unsuccessful personal development qualification. The college places a high priority on ensuring that all students have the opportunity to attain intermediate level qualifications in English and mathematics and almost all students leave the college with this accreditation.

Students are benefiting from better guidance about the courses available, which is helping them to choose the right courses. Arrangements for inducting students into college life have been revised to ensure that teachers make better use of the outcomes of initial and subject-specific diagnostic assessments to identify those who need extra help through, for example, bridging courses.

Quality of provision

How much progress has been made in improving lesson planning to ensure that teachers use a range of strategies that provide sufficient stretch, support and challenge for all learners? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection there was too much variability in the quality of written lesson plans. Since then the college has developed, and is implementing, effective strategies that are supporting teachers to use a wider range of learning and assessment methods. Teachers are now making increased use of workshops and

lessons that are focused on supporting students to work as individuals and to engage them more in delivering activities. Students are now being challenged to perform highly and are becoming more independent and resourceful learners. In a few subjects teachers provide the same activities for all students and, as a consequence, some students struggle and the most able are insufficiently challenged.

The college's arrangements for monitoring the quality of lessons have been revised to place a greater emphasis on students' learning. However, the documentation to support the process is cumbersome and does not always provide teachers with clear actions for improvement. In addition, the process does not place sufficient priority on improving teaching judged to be satisfactory. New teachers receive good support through induction, individual performance reviews and professional development activities.

How have personal and additional learning support services for students improved since the inspection? Reasonable progress

Arrangements for guidance and support were judged to be good at the last inspection and since then they have been strengthened to help to ensure that they are more effective in meeting the needs of individual students. For example, the programme designed to help students transfer from school to college is more effective in ensuring that those who need extra help are identified and helped quickly. Students receive good support to help them progress to higher education and employment. This year more students than previously have received offers from prestigious universities on highly selective courses. Those who do not wish to go to university are provided with very good advice about apprenticeships.

The college now has robust processes to monitor the impact of additional learning support on the progress of students identified to be in need. More comprehensive arrangements for initial assessment are ensuring that teachers have a better understanding of their students' ambitions and the progress they are making. However, the targets set in students' progress reviews are not always precise enough to help them to improve their grades.

Leadership and management

What progress have senior managers made in revising the college's arrangements for strategic planning? Significant progress

Since the appointment of the current principal and vice principal the college's mission, vision and values have been revised in consultation with students, governors and other staff in order to provide a clear direction and aim to become an outstanding organisation. The mission and values inform appropriate strategic targets linked to actions that are reviewed rigorously by senior managers and governors. The strategic plan sets out clearly how targets will be achieved and

provides evidence of comprehensive monitoring that prioritises future actions. Arrangements for reporting to governors have been strengthened to provide mechanisms for them to monitor closely the college's performance against the strategic aims and mission. Governors are provided with accurate reports on students' outcomes which have increased their ability to challenge senior managers. At the time of the visit the college was in the process of implementing a management restructure that has been designed to bring together strategies and teams that support improvements in standards. Senior and other managers have a very good understanding of the contribution they are making to the achievement of the college's strategic aims.

How much progress has been made in implementing arrangements to identify and share good practice?

Reasonable progress

Arrangements for sharing good practice were found to be underdeveloped at the last inspection. Since then managers have implemented a range of appropriate strategies to resolve this issue. For example, a programme of monthly meetings, which is valued by teachers, has been effective in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers from different subject areas use these meetings to identify and share good practice in areas such as techniques for starting and ending lessons, and in managing the learning environment. Teachers are also benefiting from increased opportunities to observe their peers which are helping them to have the confidence to try out new approaches in their work. Managers and teachers involved in developing new vocational courses are working together well to share strategies for monitoring students' progress. Senior managers are using short visits to lessons more regularly to monitor the quality of the experience provided for students. The outcomes from lesson observations are not used sufficiently to highlight and share best practice. Managers work collaboratively with partner schools and local colleges to ensure that the curriculum is designed to help students progress to further education.

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