

SEEVIC College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

SEEVIC College is a medium sized college, which was previously a sixth form college but did not designate as such in 2010. It now identifies itself as a general further education college and has reviewed its mission, vision and values in line with its new identity. The main campus is situated in Benfleet, Essex but there is a new campus in Basildon town centre. Almost half the students study vocational qualifications, with substantial numbers studying foundation and intermediate courses. A small but growing number of students are following work-based learning and Train to Gain programmes. The college offers courses in 13 of the 15 subject areas. The number of students aged 16 to 18 has grown steadily from 2,063 in 2003/04 to 2,719 in 2008/09. Students attend the college from an increasingly diverse catchment area including Southend, Castle Point, Rochford, Basildon and Thurrock. In 2008/09, some 7% of students identified themselves as coming from a minority ethnic heritage; a higher percentage than is found in the surrounding local communities. Unemployment in the local area is below average. The proportion of young people achieving five A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, in Essex and Southend is above average but in Thurrock it is well below average.

The last full inspection took place in May 2009. Overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management (including equality of opportunity) were all judged to be good. Achievement and standards were satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in further developing self-assessment and quality improvement in order to raise standards?	Reasonable progress
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The college's new management structure, built around three academies of similar size and capacity, plus a smaller skills academy, became fully operational at the start of the autumn term, 2010. A key focus for the restructuring of management was the desire to produce consistent and high quality outcomes for learners. Staff welcome the clearer lines of communication with their new managers and say that they appreciate the new, open style of college management. Responsibilities within the self-assessment process have also changed in line with the new management structure. Early outputs of the new system are promising. The academy self-assessment plans are more self-critical than their forerunners and the quality assurance of teaching and learning has become more sharply focused and incisive. However, self-assessment reports for curriculum areas do not contain sufficient actions related to improving the quality of learning. The college is aware that the use

of students' views in identifying the need for, and evaluating the impact of, initiatives to improve teaching and learning require further development and has plans to strengthen the use of the learners' voice in its quality assurance procedures.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving student outcomes on advanced level courses?

Reasonable progress

Success rates on national diploma courses were maintained at a high level in 2009/10, with students achieving a good proportion of higher grades. Success rates at A level have increased since the last inspection but remain close to the national average, whilst at AS level success rates are below average. The proportions of higher grades achieved in AS and A level subjects are low. Student outcomes at AS and A level are inconsistent between subjects and years and the college has introduced a range of well-considered actions to counter this variability. New teachers have been appointed to areas where student outcomes were low, entry criteria for AS and A level subjects have been raised where necessary and initial advice and guidance has been strengthened. The rate of progression from AS to A level is high.

What progress has been made in ensuring that students make sufficient progress in AS and A level subjects?

Insufficient progress

The progress, which students make, as measured by value-added analysis, has not improved since the last inspection and the scores for AS level subjects now show a marked and progressive decline over three years. In approximately half of AS and A level subjects, students are not making as much progress as they should. Lesson observations from the last cycle do not provide sufficient information to contribute to the college's assessment of progress in lessons but inspectors observed current students' progress being monitored very closely.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring that teaching addresses the needs of all learners?

Insufficient progress

The new senior management team have given a high priority to improving teaching and learning and, using robust methods of analysis, have identified that the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection has been insubstantial, particularly in GCE AS and A level subjects. Their analysis reveals that the extent to which teachers challenge students to reach their full potential is an area for improvement in the majority of subjects. The college's response has been timely and includes the appointment of advanced teaching practitioners to support the sharing of best practice across subjects and academies. However, most initiatives are recent and it is too early to assess their full impact. The strengths in teaching

and learning, which have contributed to the high success rates on national diploma courses, have been maintained.

Have the college's efforts to improve information, advice and guidance resulted in a better match between prior attainment and the needs and interests of students? **Significant progress**

The college has put in place a range of effective measures to improve information, advice and guidance in the current academic year. A number of initiatives, including reinstating taster days and using a piece of set work in each subject as part of the application process, have worked well to ensure that students have a more realistic view of the content and demands of each subject. Managers have given more support to the interview procedures and tutors have worked together very effectively to ensure that students can seek expert advice about their options at interview. As a result, far fewer students have changed their course in the early part of the term than in previous years. Teachers and managers are more confident that students are placed on the right course based on their ability, needs and interests. The development of the vocational curriculum has supported this work considerably, as vocational options are now available in the majority of subject areas.

What progress has the college made in using target grades to support individual learner progress? **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, the college has placed a greater emphasis on target setting. Curriculum managers see the use of target grades as an increasingly influential way of helping students to achieve their potential and have developed systems to promote the consistent and regular use of targets. The introduction of a software package to record and analyse target setting data has been well received by staff; personal and subject tutors are using it effectively. Although at an early stage of implementation, the combination of minimum target grades, predicted grades and the new aspirational grades is becoming better understood by staff and students and providing a greater challenge to them to achieve high grades. Short-term written targets feature as part of individual learning reviews and were used to particularly good effect as part of the intervention work done in the summer of 2010 with AS level students who were working at a lower standard than they should have been.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in developing still further its learner involvement strategy? **Reasonable progress**

There is a strong commitment at all levels in the college to involving learners more in college life but several actions planned for 2010, such as a learners' conference, did not take place because of other priorities. The learner involvement strategy is

detailed and wide ranging in its scope but is still in draft form; some aspects of the representation of learners on various college forums are insufficiently explicit. The student association has undergone a resurgence this academic year, with a dedicated and informative student association page and much lively interest in the election of course and class representatives. Managers recognise that there needs to be a greater involvement of students in self-assessment and decision making forums across the college and plans are in place to make these happen.

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