

# Gateway Sixth Form College

## Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## **RE-INSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Gateway Sixth Form College moved from the city centre to a new building in the north-east of Leicester in September 2009.

Gateway College is not a typical sixth form college. The college operates an open access policy and approximately 60% of students are studying courses at or below intermediate level. Many students enter the college with low prior attainment and provision includes specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In 2009/10, the college offered 35 GCE A levels and AS levels. In addition, significant vocational options at foundation, intermediate and advanced level are available including five new vocational courses at either intermediate level or advanced level. Skills for life, literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages are also available. The vast majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and study full-time. The largest areas of the college are in preparation for life and work and in visual and performing arts. The college's mission is 'Striving for excellence in all we do'.

In 2009/10 the college enrolled around 1,125 learners aged 16 to 18. Around a third of learners are on foundation programmes.

The college profile reflects the locality with the majority of students drawn from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A high proportion of students are from areas of significant deprivation and approximately 70% receive Educational Maintenance Awards. The majority of students are bilingual and many do not speak English as their first language.

The college was inspected in October 2009. Overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management were all judged satisfactory. Two subject areas were inspected. Visual and performing arts was judged to be good and science and mathematics was judged to be inadequate.

During this academic year, the principal and chair of governors have both had serious health conditions and have been absent for long periods. The principal is on a phased return to work and will be retiring in summer 2010. The college has recently recruited a new principal who has not yet started in post.

## Themes

### Self-assessment and improvement planning

**What progress has Gateway Sixth Form College made in securing improvements in science and mathematics provision?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, the management structure within science and mathematics has been strengthened and includes additional senior management and external support. Divisional managers now monitor course outcomes more closely with course leaders. Staff have additional opportunities to discuss and share good practice.

In September 2009, in order to improve the match of learners' needs to the course offer, more rigorous entry qualifications were applied on GCE A-level courses. In addition an advanced vocational science course was introduced as an alternative. The suite of related intermediate level vocational courses was also extended.

Tutorial, individual tracking processes and attendance monitoring are now more rigorously applied. Student performance reviews have been increased to four a year. Support for underachieving students, including additional workshops, is targeted closely to students' needs. Not all learners are able to attend additional sessions because of their timing. Students know and understand their minimum target grades and aspirational grades. More able learners are insufficiently challenged and stretched by teaching and learning.

Information from initial and diagnostic assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is being used effectively within science and mathematics to identify further accreditation and additional support needs; but its use in lesson planning is underdeveloped. The language, literacy and numeracy needs of science courses have not been analysed in order to develop the necessary skills within students' main programmes. Currently some, but not all, learners receive the help they need to improve their literacy skills. Students speak positively about the newly introduced 'maths for scientists' course.

While it is too early to see the impact of many measures, AS January module results indicate some improvement in outcomes. Attendance and retention remain at their previous high levels on most courses and variations are monitored closely.

Divisional managers have identified a range of issues and interventions to be introduced in 2010/11 to bring about further improvement. This includes extending the vocational offer, more rigorous application of self-assessment, and specific improvements in biology and physics, with a strong emphasis on developing learners' levels of literacy.

**What progress has been made in setting and monitoring measurable targets within curriculum operational plans?****Insufficient progress**

Currently curriculum action plans are produced through curriculum review and self-assessment processes. These have a strong focus on quality improvement. Although such divisional plans identify targets for improvement in overall success rates, they lack other measurable targets which would identify the achievement of other college performance indicators. Monitoring within the divisions and at senior levels is at course level and this is leading to appropriate interventions. However, there is insufficient reporting at an aggregate level to indicate whether such interventions are leading to the achievement of college targets. As at the last inspection, the absence of clearly defined targets and measures of progress against targets weakens performance management.

**To what extent are the views of students informing assessment of the quality of provision and action planning for improvement within subject areas and across the college?****Reasonable progress**

Since the inspection, student information in the October course reviews has fed into judgments in the December self-assessment report. Student governors are involved directly in the drafting of the college self-assessment report. The second course reviews took place in February; the use of student feedback information varied across courses. Good practice is found in the foundation art course, where effective use is made of questionnaire responses, focus groups and de-briefs of major projects.

Throughout the college, students feel their views are recognised and responded to well through the system of tutorial and divisional representatives, the student council and student governors. Student representatives are increasingly using Moodle to communicate feedback to the student body. The student council and student governors provide opportunities for involvement at senior college levels and enable key or difficult messages to be communicated well. Students appreciate being involved in staff appointments including the recent appointments of the principal and the head of science and mathematics. Improvements since the previous inspection affecting the whole student body include, increased student car parking, the introduction on an end-of-day college bus and greater diversity in the food offered in the canteen. In addition, improvements have also had a positive impact on staff training in the sharing of best practice in teaching and learning strategies and materials across courses.

## Outcomes for learners

### What progress has the college made in improving student outcomes?

**Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, very few external examinations have taken place; however the limited evidence on GCE A-level and AS courses indicates a general improvement in grades at AS level, but a lack of overall improvement at GCE A level. The college is in the process of reviewing student achievement against minimum expected grades through course reviews, but data has not yet been collated and reviewed.

Course level data is monitored closely and actions discussed with relevant managers. However, the senior team do not routinely report data at an aggregate level to judge whether the college is achieving its targets. Data prepared for inspection indicates that attendance has improved slightly, retention has been maintained at high levels and that achievement is predicted to improve by three percentage points, narrowing the gap to the sector national average.

Processes to collect and disseminate student enrolment and attendance data have improved since the last inspection and students can access much personal information themselves. While staff have been trained in data access, crucial reports of students at risk of non-attendance are also distributed in hard copy to support staff effectively.

### What progress has the college made in setting and monitoring challenging targets for students so they reach their potential?

**Reasonable progress**

The new electronic system for setting and monitoring challenging targets for students is used well throughout the college. All subject tutors are now using the new system to plan and review minimum expected grades, current progress and subject target grades. Subject reviews across the college have been increased to four times a year. Records show that throughout the college on both academic and vocational courses, stretch and challenge are being built into target grades. In addition, the useful grading of attitude to work and meeting of assignment deadlines, along with clear action points provide valuable information for detailed discussion. For the twice yearly tutor reviews with students, around 50% of tutors now use the electronic system directly, and the others have their hand-written reports scanned until compulsory electronic input starts in 2010/11. However, the system has not yet been evaluated against interim student outcomes or students' achievement against targets. Evaluation against final student outcomes is planned for the end of the academic year. Target-setting is being used effectively in lessons by some subject teachers. For example, in GCE A-level English language, students' own self-assessment of current working levels and targets and action points to improve are well supported by useful comments and suggestions from the teacher.

## Quality of Provision

**To what extent have revised arrangements for assessing learners on entry improved their ability to succeed and on the development of their language, literacy and numeracy skills?**

**Reasonable progress**

For 2009/10, a nationally recognised electronic initial and diagnostic assessment was used to assess all students and identify their support needs. However, the information was not applied consistently in a timely manner to inform course placement or additional learning support. The information from diagnostic assessment is now used in reviews of students' progress and when planning progression. It will be available for new students and enrolment staff for the next academic year. The college's support team has evaluated the progress of the revised arrangements and identified adjustments to take place to improve further the support for students. Plans are in place to introduce bridging courses from foundation to intermediate level for some subjects, based on literacy and numeracy assessments. Diagnostic assessments are planned for June rather than September for students enrolling in 2010/11, to provide information earlier and enable staff to plan support efficiently to begin at the start of courses. Useful work by literacy support staff with subject teams across the college shows a wide range of activities to improve curriculum staff awareness of additional support ideas for students on courses. Three hundred students currently receive additional support; however, the effectiveness of current support requirements has not yet been evaluated formally.

**To what extent is good practice in teaching and learning being shared in order to improve consistency across all areas of the college?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the inspection, much development work has taken place, led by an enthusiastic group of teaching and learning staff. A comprehensive, clear and detailed teaching and learning policy is in use, which has useful information for staff. However, lesson plans vary in quality and content, and do not all conform to the policy's required minimum details. However, in some subjects other useful documentation supplements them effectively to provide stretch and to challenge students.

Continuous professional development is wide-spread across college staff and evaluations are positive. The new peer shadowing scheme is welcomed and valued by staff. Reflective practice is already well established and illustrates the usefulness to individuals of opportunities to observe colleagues. Trend analysis from the established teaching and learning observation process has identified individual staff and cross-college themes for further staff development. However, attendance has been low on the wide range of development opportunities available to part-time evening staff. The college plans to provide these opportunities again at the end of the academic year during staff development days.

## **Leadership and management**

### **What progress has the senior team and governors made in developing strategic objectives? Reasonable progress**

In January 2010 college governors and senior managers met and agreed guidelines for the 2010/13 strategic plan. This re-affirmed the ethos of an open access college, with a greater emphasis on matching the entry qualifications of students to a broader base of appropriate qualifications across the levels. Following a delay resulting from the ill health of the principal, a discussion paper was produced and shared within the college. The draft proposes a realistic and well-thought out set of corporate strategic objectives written in broad terms. These have not yet been developed to a stage to support operational planning. It is proposed that the newly appointed principal, who has yet to take up post, will be heavily involved in the further development of the document. In the interim, a strategy working group comprising senior managers and governors, including the staff and student governors, are refining the detail of the proposals.

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