

Wyke Sixth Form College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Wyke Sixth Form College is a medium-sized college, situated in western Kingston-upon-Hull. It serves 1,250 students from the city and the East Riding of Yorkshire. Around 75% of students live in the city of Hull, where one-third of the working population is unemployed. The college has grown significantly in recent years. Most students are aged 16 to 19 and 85% are on advanced level programmes. Approximately 45 advanced-level courses are offered by the college and some students prepare for advanced-level study through a one-year intermediate programme. A foundation course is also available. The college has made significant investments in recent years that have resulted in an impressive newly-built campus.

At the last full inspection of Wyke Sixth Form College, carried out in April 2008, the college was judged to be good overall. At this inspection four curriculum areas were inspected and graded: mathematics was graded satisfactory; visual arts, psychology and sociology, and business, administration and law were all graded good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in ensuring that the self-assessment process accurately judges course performance and is effective in monitoring and improving under performance?

Significant progress

At the last inspection self-assessment was judged to be thorough and inclusive but action plans were not sufficiently detailed or easily evaluated. The college's current self-assessment clearly has improving learner performance at its heart. It is accurate and comprehensive and it regularly secures improvements. Action plans are now detailed and effectively monitored. The self-assessment process is sophisticated and accessible online. The college has significantly developed its online capacity for its self-assessment processes over time. There are very good systems for evaluating and monitoring performance at subject level. Subjects are monitored in real time and can demonstrate improved learner performance. There is good subject management and swift identification and actions in areas of concern. Quick and effective action has already been taken in mathematics, information and communication technology, psychology, biology, and health and social care. There is good understanding and use of data across the college. The college is honest and rigorous in its self-assessment. Currently all subjects graded inadequate can demonstrate accurate analysis of the issues and good development plans to improve.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in ensuring the continued improvement in success rates, retention and value-added scores?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the college demonstrated high pass rates and excellent added value on many GCE A level courses. These have been maintained. Success rates for foundation-level (16-18-year-old) students have improved significantly in 2009/10. However, overall success rates for advanced-level courses slightly declined in 2009/10. Around 60% of students qualified for education maintenance allowances and 40% of enrolments qualify for a disadvantage up-lift. College staff care deeply about the performance of their students and are continually developing strategies to improve retention and outcomes for students. A thorough and sophisticated analysis of the reasons for some low success and retention rates has been carried out and actions have been taken. They include stricter entry criteria and detailed analysis of academic starting points that are shared with subject leaders to inform entry criteria. The innovative Wyke Start programme has been further developed. It provides a good extended induction to the college and a reality check for students about what is involved in succeeding in their chosen subjects. The college has taken great care not to disadvantage students by the revision of some entry criteria and it has significantly widened the courses offered.

Quality of provision

How are students' views used to improve the learning experience and college provision?

Significant progress

In the college there is a strong and central focus on students' experiences and a commitment to consulting students on teaching, learning, facilities and support. Their views are collected through a wide range of mechanisms, both formal and informal, college-wide and departmental. They include questionnaires, focus groups, the student association, tutorials and the direct opportunity to email the principal. The college is constantly refining how students' views can impact on teaching, learning and the curriculum. Students are regularly consulted on how their lessons are going and on teaching and learning preferences. These views are used effectively to develop teaching and learning. More recently, students have expressed their concerns about the loss of education maintenance allowances and the college is responding with other forms of assistance to help many students to access its provision. Students contributed to the design of the new college buildings through the Learning Environments Committee, expressing the desire for a 'campus feel' that was more like a university with a 'wow factor'. This has certainly been achieved and students are very positive about their accommodation.

What has been the impact on learners of the revised arrangements for tutorials?

Significant progress

Wyke College has made well-considered and effective revised arrangements for tutorials. These developments have improved the experience for students, ensuring greater consistency and raising the profile of tutorials across the college. There is a dedicated and committed team of tutors. Tutors work with subject teachers to improve attendance, retention, and the tracking and monitoring of students' progress. Attendance and retention have improved in the 2010/11 academic year compared with the same time last year. The college has developed an impressive electronic student tracking and communication system, known as the eRecord. Staff and students have access to, and make effective use of, the eRecord. It records concerns, commendations, target grades and current students' performance. Tracking and monitoring are extremely thorough, and reviews have recently been increased to five per year. Students can see at a glance their performance level and they can respond to teacher and tutor comments. The posting of commendations as well as concerns positively encourages improvement. The college has invested heavily in providing appropriate support for its students, including learning mentors and additional learning-support tutors. This is very much appreciated by students and is helping many of them to stay on course and succeed.

Leadership and management

How is the college developing teaching and learning across the college?

Significant progress

Teaching and learning at the last inspection were good and the college has further developed activities to enhance teaching and learning. Staff development for teaching and learning is innovative. It is based around 15 teaching and learning groups, each made up of four or five members of staff. Groups cross subject boundaries and all levels of seniority. This work is supported by research and external consultants. The make up of the groups contributes significantly to collegiality, and develops trust and sharing between colleagues. Evidence from the groups demonstrates experimentation and evaluation of teaching by staff and students. Students are consulted by their subject teachers about their preferences in teaching and learning. Students are also encouraged to evaluate teaching experiments and their impact on learning. In a variety of subject areas, for example, mathematics and biology, their views have had a significant impact on teaching and learning strategies. The teaching and learning observation scheme is rigorous. A key theme from the observation of teaching scheme in 2009/10 is to keep students informed about their progress. This has been achieved and all students spoken to during the visit are very clear about their progress and their aims.

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