

# Gateway Sixth Form College

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130755

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

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

Gateway is a medium-sized sixth form college that offers courses from foundation to advanced level. The college located to a new building in Hamilton in the north-east of Leicester in August 2009. Nearly two thirds of its students study at foundation and intermediate levels. Many students enter the college with low prior attainment. Approximately two thirds of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In 2010/11 the college enrolled 1,253 students, of whom 1,136 are aged 16 to 18. The college Principal has been in post since July 2010.

Ofsted inspectors conducted a partial reinspection and monitoring visit of the college in October 2010. The outcome of the reinspection of science and mathematics was that it remained inadequate. In the four themes linked to the college's full inspection in October 2009 progress was judged to be insufficient. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has the college made with its self-assessment and quality improvement planning in order to accelerate improvements in students' achievements?** **Reasonable progress**

The current self-assessment report (SAR) is more realistic and contains more valid judgements than the previous version. These judgements relate more closely to students' outcomes. Governors are closely involved in agreeing SAR judgements. There is no overarching quality improvement plan that encompasses the post inspection action plan and the issues raised in the SAR; such issues are in the faculty SARs. These have also improved as has their emphasis on students' outcomes. Consequently grading is more realistic. The quality of faculty target setting is variable. Some targets are specific while others are vague. Senior leaders and heads of faculty have increased their monitoring of course reviews, aided by the improving use of data. The clear aim for the future is to streamline faculty SARs, improve the presentation and use of data and increase the consistency of target setting. Managers are aware of the need to incorporate outcomes from lesson observations in course reviews, SARs and action plans more than is currently the case. These and other improvements have led to:

- increased retention
- increased AS and GCE A-level module pass rates
- higher attendance
- significant staff restructuring

- increasing culture of staff accountability
- increasing focus on change related to the new strategic plan.

### **Outcomes for learners**

#### **What progress has the college made in improving students' outcomes?**

**Reasonable progress**

College data indicate a slight improvement in attendance in 2010/11 as a result of more timely attendance monitoring and an improvement in retention. Outcomes from January GCE module examinations indicate an increase in achievement. Accurate and timely data are available to staff to enable them to monitor performance more effectively. More regular scrutiny and monitoring of student data by governors, senior managers and heads of faculty, have resulted in a greater awareness of potential issues and facilitated a swifter response in helping students to succeed. For example, weekly checks by heads of faculty and the Deputy Principal on students who are underperforming now take place. Senior managers are taking a more active role in mentoring underperforming students, for example, the Principal is mentoring those who failed their January examinations.

Arrangements for reviewing the performance of staff from September 2011 are planned to include a much sharper focus on the achievement of student targets to drive improvement further. Student review weeks will be introduced in 2011/12 to provide more frequent opportunities to focus on student performance in-year and ensure appropriate support is put in place where students are underperforming. Activities to celebrate students' achievements are developing well and improve the promotion of student success. The impact of arrangements to improve students' outcomes will not be fully apparent until after the examination results in August 2011.

### **Quality of provision**

#### **What progress has been made in improving the proportion of good quality lessons in all areas of the college and in sharing good practice in teaching and learning?**

**Reasonable progress**

From September 2011, the college's own lesson observation system is planned to include a sharper focus on learning to better inform managers of the overall quality of lessons. Outcomes from observations will be more closely linked to performance management arrangements. A small team of observers has been trained to undertake observations to promote consistency. Teachers have received training in the new process. Standardised lesson planning documentation is used more consistently across the college. A more systematic approach to the sharing of good practice is in place through faculty meetings. From September 2011 managers intend to introduce a regular Wednesday afternoon period for training, development and

meetings, and strengthened arrangements for peer observations and shadowing opportunities. The new programme team leader role has a clear focus on developing the quality of teaching and learning.

Students say the majority of lessons are of good quality but that a minority of teachers do not plan for their individual needs and preferences sufficiently well. Five joint lesson observations were conducted with four of the college's observers. Inspectors agreed with the college observers' feedback on the quality of learning within the lessons observed. Support and development arrangements arising out of action plans from observations graded satisfactory or inadequate within the revised lesson observation procedure are unclear. It is too early to judge the impact of the revised arrangements on raising the quality of teaching and learning.

**What progress has been made in ensuring that students have challenging and realistic targets to encourage them to reach their full potential, including for language, literacy and numeracy needs?** **Reasonable progress**

Due to technical issues with the electronic system for setting and monitoring students' targets introduced in 2009/10 the college has adopted a new approach which has been trialled across the college in 2010/11. The web-based GLIDE system (Gateway Learning Information and Data Environment) is used well by around half of tutors currently, with all tutors moving to the new system in September 2011. It incorporates students' attendance and examination or course target data clearly while enabling tutors to update agreed short term targets and actions. A 'traffic lights' approach to assessing students' performance is proving effective in highlighting whether they are on target or underperforming. Information on students' literacy and numeracy assessments and levels is not yet included. Around half the staff have received training in setting more meaningful short and long term targets for students. The quality of students' targets varies. Some are too general to help students improve in the short term. The college has yet to complete an evaluation of how accurate teachers' target setting is against achievements. Managers agree that the use of student target data in lesson planning is not yet applied consistently across the college.

**What progress has been made in ensuring students are on the most appropriate course and that their language, literacy and numeracy skills are developed appropriately?** **Reasonable progress**

Entry requirements for courses have been reviewed and are more rigorously and consistently applied. The college ensures all students' literacy skills are evaluated on enrolment as a priority and the provision of support was more timely in 2010/11 compared to previous years. Students without a GCSE Grade C or above in English or mathematics are expected to retake these subjects, or an appropriate level qualification. Plans to introduce new GCSE English and mathematics syllabuses from September 2011, which include a greater emphasis on functional skill development, are well advanced. A more systematic approach to dyslexia screening will be

introduced from September 2011 to enable appropriate support to be put in place. Changes to learning support workers' contracts have resulted in reduced absence. The retention of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved significantly in 2010/11. An evaluation of the impact of support is carried out at the end of each academic year.

**What progress has been made in improving science and mathematics, judged to be inadequate on reinspection?**

**Insufficient progress**

The GCSE sciences high grade pass rate data for 2010/11 have increased compared with those for 2009/10. The GCSE mathematics high grade pass rate has increased slightly in the same period. The overall AS and A-level pass rates for mathematics, sciences and psychology in the January 2011 modules, however, have not improved compared with those for January 2010. The results for chemistry, psychology and biology are of concern, but the results for physics are especially disappointing. The pass rates for mathematics and further mathematics have improved over the same period. Many subject data for AS and A-level sciences and psychology in the January 2011 modules are low at higher grades and at A\*-G grades. The faculty SAR judges the overall effectiveness of the area as inadequate and its capacity to improve as satisfactory. This SAR contains a detailed analysis of data which managers use to determine judgements and grading. Managers are making improvements to:

- the more rigorous implementation of entry criteria
- lesson plan, scheme of work and lesson observation documentation
- the individual learning plan process
- course reviews.

Many of these, however, are recent innovations and it is too early to judge their impact on students' outcomes.

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