

Thomas Rotherham 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

Thomas Rotherham College is a sixth-form college located one mile from the centre of Rotherham. It was established as a sixth-form college in 1967 on the site of a former grammar school which dates back to 1483. The college's core business is the provision of full-time general education courses for students aged 16 to 18. At 1 November 2010, 914 lower-sixth and 637 upper-sixth students aged 16 to 18 were enrolled, of whom 95% are following Level 3 programmes and 5% Level 2 programmes. The college provides for 266 adult students of which 182 are enrolled under adult responsiveness and 84 are enrolled under employer responsiveness, including Train to Gain programmes. Provision for adults has decreased over the last few years in the light of reductions in government funding and no further enrolments are being made onto community provision.

The most recent inspection report was published in May 2009. Inspectors judged the college's overall effectiveness, quality of provision and leadership and management to be satisfactory. Achievement and standards were judged to be good, as was the college's capacity to improve. The college's arrangements for equality of opportunity were judged to be satisfactory. The provision in science and mathematics, arts, media and publishing, and languages, literature and culture was judged to be good. The provision in health, public services and care, and in preparation for life and work, was judged to be satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving self-assessment and quality improvement planning, so that managers can identify weaknesses at an early stage and take swift action to tackle them?	Significant progress
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The college has taken highly effective action to improve the use of self-assessment. It has developed more inclusive arrangements to involve all staff, including support staff. Clear guidance to heads of department on self-assessment, and thorough cross moderation, have improved the consistency and quality of curriculum reports. Staff have shared good self-assessment practices across curriculum areas. Self-assessment draws on a wider range of evidence than previously, including quantitative data, learners' views and teaching observations. Although the college collects the views of parents and employers, these do not contribute to self-assessment.

Self-assessment, additional in-depth audits and the better use of data throughout the year to monitor performance are helping the college to identify and address promptly areas of concern. The report is self-critical and evaluative, closely aligned with the criteria of the Common Inspection Framework, and clearly identifies strengths and

areas for improvement. Self-assessment is used well to drive quality-improvement planning at departmental and whole college level. However, target-setting at curriculum level sometimes lacks sufficient detail.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in ensuring the continued and consistent improvement to maintain high success rates? **Reasonable progress**

The college has maintained the high success rates at the time of the previous inspection. Success rates on long courses in 2009/10 were 81%. The college has managed well a slight decline in success rates from the 2008/09 rate and has taken appropriate action to arrest the decline, which was mainly due to poor general studies results for 725 lower-sixth students. Results from the January examinations show an increase in achievement rates and an increase in the number of high grades when compared with previous years. The predominant qualifications taken at the college are Level 3 qualifications for learners aged 16 to 18 where retention has improved to 93%; this now matches the rate nationally. Success rates for AS level qualifications have improved slightly since the last inspection to 75.8%, but still lag behind the national rate. Success rates on A2 level qualifications have also increased slightly and are close to the national rate of 94.8%.

Learners make good progress from their Level 2 attainment on entry. The college closely monitors learners' progress towards their anticipated grades, as well as the anticipated success rates and value added scores for all courses. Value added is positive for many courses and the college has clear action plans in place where courses have been identified as underperforming.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in continuing the good focus on providing good quality guidance and support for learners? **Significant progress**

The college continues to provide good support for learners. Vulnerable and underperforming students are quickly identified and cared for through highly effective collaborative support. Students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported. Learning mentors offer lunch time drop-ins for students. In January 2010, the college appointed a sexual-health liaison officer to support students and to foster good relationships with the local services that support sexual health.

The college has strengthened and extended already strong links with local schools to provide good transition arrangements, including a particularly successful induction during which prospective students can sample lessons from the subjects they are considering in order to make informed choices about their programmes. During Level

2 induction, the importance of obtaining mathematics and English qualifications is emphasised, along with the development of study skills. Systems for monitoring attendance, punctuality and learners' progress are rigorous. The group tutorial programme contains informative sessions encouraging students to practise safe and healthy lifestyles and there is strong support for students' emotional well-being. Careers guidance has been further developed to provide good advice to help students progress into higher education, employment or further training. The learning support department has further developed its programme of support for students with additional learning needs who are applying for university.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in introducing and embedding effective measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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The college has introduced a range of strategies to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Action research projects on aspects of classroom practice such as active learning and the effective use of questioning, teaching and learning forums, and the increasing use of the college intranet, have helped staff to share practice across curriculum areas. The college seeks learners' views on teaching quality in a variety of ways, including intranet-based surveys and discussions with teaching staff.

Observations of teaching and learning are now used more effectively to improve quality. Observers identify areas for development for all staff. Managers support staff in planning action for improvement and monitor their progress. An audit of all schemes of work in September led to improvements in the quality and consistency of planning. In order to emphasise the developmental purpose of lesson observations, the college made the decision to end the practice of grading lessons. An external evaluation of teaching quality, incorporating grading carried out by external consultants in March 2011, indicated that the quality of teaching and learning has improved. However, in the absence of grading, the college's internal systems lack the capacity to measure future improvement.

What progress has been made in embedding the arrangements for safeguarding to meet government legislative requirements?	Significant progress
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Safeguarding has a clear priority within the college. The procedures for safeguarding students now meet government requirements. Staff who come into regular and frequent contact with young people have been trained to an appropriate level and been subject to enhanced criminal records bureau checks. Suitable risk assessments are in place for new appointments when criminal records bureau checks are delayed.

Nine staff who have responsibility for recruitment have been further trained. The college has established a single central record of checks carried out on staff. All governors have been trained in safeguarding and one governor, with a background of working in the area of protection of vulnerable young people, has specific responsibility for safeguarding. College policies and procedures are now approved by governors annually and governors also receive an annual safeguarding report.

A safeguarding forum has been established which includes governor and learner representation. Good links exist with the local safeguarding board and a forum has been established with local colleges to discuss and share good practice in safeguarding.

Learners say that they feel safe in college. Risk assessments are carried out in work placements as well as checks that work placement providers have access to a safeguarding policy and to updates regarding safeguarding issues.

What progress has been made in improving the efficient and effective use of resources with a particular emphasis on promoting sustainability? Reasonable progress

The college continues to maintain its efficient and effective use of resources to improve the learning environment. It now places a greater emphasis on sustainable development. Progress on this has been recognised through a recent external quality award nomination. Since 2005/06, the college has enhanced the learning environment, while reducing energy costs. Recent building adaptations have extended social and catering areas. A new building, incorporating a number of energy saving features, has added to the good quality teaching accommodation. Better insulation and temperature controls have improved the comfort of the buildings and contributed towards significant savings in energy costs.

The college has established a student environmental working group to raise awareness of sustainability issues and to involve students in reducing the college's carbon footprint. The college has acted on proposals to reduce the amount of paper used for printing and increase the use of recycling. The successful engagement of students in this initiative has also been recognised through an external award. Some areas of the curriculum, such as environmental studies, address sustainability issues well. Engagement with the community through student activities such as charity and volunteering initiatives also supports sustainable living. However, sustainable development is not yet promoted through a whole-college policy or plan.

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