

Kingston College

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

Kingston College is a large general further education college in the London Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames. Students come from a wide area of South and West London, with a much higher proportion of students from minority ethnic heritage than that seen in the immediate locality. All local schools have sixth forms and the area has some very high-achieving grammar schools and independent schools. The proportion of school leavers attaining five A* to C grades at GCSE is well above average, although average point scores for students joining the college are often below national averages.

At the last inspection in September 2010, overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for students, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality and diversity were all judged satisfactory and safeguarding was judged good. Of the six curriculum areas inspected, two were judged good, three satisfactory, but science and mathematics provision was judged inadequate.

At the most recent monitoring visit in May 2011, the college was judged to have made significant progress in two themes and reasonable progress in four, including reasonable progress in improving provision in science and mathematics.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3

Context

Currently 975 students study science and mathematics, of whom 80% are aged 16 to 18 and attend full time. Around 400 students take GCSE mathematics, over 170 are enrolled on GCSE science programmes and 12 study the BTEC first diploma in applied science. The access to higher education provision has grown markedly over the past two years with 77 adult students currently on the access to science course. There are 80 students on advanced-level vocational programmes in applied sciences and 48 students are completing GCE A-level biology, chemistry and physics this year. The college has recently discontinued AS-level provision in science. Over 100 students are studying AS- and GCE A-level mathematics.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students in science and mathematics have improved and are satisfactory overall. In 2010/11 the proportion of students who successfully achieved their qualifications improved by eight percentage points to 73%, close to the national average for similar colleges.

- Achievements were good in 2010/11 on intermediate- and advanced-level vocational science and access to higher education in science programmes. However, outcomes for students on AS- and A-level science courses were poor. While students' achievements on GCSE science programmes improved in 2011, the proportion achieving A* to C grades remained below national averages.
- Outcomes for students in mathematics were broadly satisfactory in 2010/11. The proportion achieving A* to C grades on GCSE mathematics courses improved to just above the national average. However, attainment remains variable on advanced-level mathematics programmes. Outcomes on AS-level mathematics improved, but remained below average, while students achieved well on GCE A-level mathematics courses.
- Students enjoy their studies and generally work well in lessons. They make progress at, or slightly above, the level predicted from their prior attainment. Progression to higher education is good for those completing advanced-level courses. However, lower achievement on several GCSE courses means that too few students progress from intermediate to advanced-level courses.
- Attendance has improved over the past year and is satisfactory. Teachers now follow up absences more assiduously and managers monitor registers more carefully. The proportion of students completing their courses improved to 93% in 2010/11 and was above the previous year's national average.
- Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory, although the quality of learning varies considerably between courses and levels. In advanced-level courses, especially in vocational science, teaching and learning are good and students make good progress. Teachers expect, and receive, high standards of behaviour and work from their students, who ask questions thoughtfully and listen to each other respectfully. Students participate well in interesting group and individual activities and are clear about their targets and progress.
- However, in GCSE mathematics and some GCSE science courses, teaching and learning are no more than satisfactory rather than good. In a minority of lessons objectives are not clear, activities are not sufficiently interesting or relevant to maintain students' attention, with occasional examples of disruptive behaviour. Managers are aware of these shortcomings and are working to improve teaching in these areas.
- Assessment is much improved. Teachers and managers monitor students' progress more closely. This has resulted in more robust tracking and monitoring and more accurate predicted grades for students to work towards. However, tracking data are not yet integrated with students' personal learning plans and many targets are still not specific enough to help students improve.
- Teachers are developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) well, through the use of electronic whiteboards and relevant video clips, to develop students' understanding. The virtual learning environment for science and mathematics has improved and students report that it contains a good range of resources that they can access from outside the college.

- Recently appointed staff are introducing new and interesting enrichment opportunities for students, but it is too early to judge the impact of these changes on enhancing learning and raising achievement.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory and managers are actively tackling the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Teaching and learning have improved, assessments are now more robust and subject areas are now better managed. Success rates on GCSE and AS-level sciences remain low, although college data suggest that in-year attendance and retention rates have improved. Subject team meetings are now much more focused on careful curriculum and lesson planning to maintain students' interest and increase participation in lessons. Self-assessment is thorough and accurately identifies areas needing further improvement and team targets are both realistic and challenging.

What does Kingston College need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' attainment in GCSE sciences and mathematics by helping teachers plan interesting and relevant activities and to set clear expectations for students' behaviour and participation in lessons and standards of work.
- Ensure that the best practice in teaching and learning that exists in science and mathematics is used to help all teachers to raise the standards of students' work.
- Ensure that progress tracking is fully integrated with students' personal learning plans and that targets are specific and measurable to help students improve their achievement.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How well have the college's strengthened systems for self-assessment and quality assurance contributed to continuing improvements in provision and outcomes?

Reasonable progress

The college has created a culture where curriculum teams are now held accountable for their performance and students' outcomes. Training for curriculum managers in analysis of performance data and evaluative writing skills has improved the quality and rigour of curriculum level self-assessment reports. Managers now make effective use of student performance data to support judgments on outcomes for students and the effectiveness of provision, although this is not always presented in a clear and consistent format in curriculum self-assessment reports. For example, while some managers analyse performance trends over several years and make clear comparisons with relevant national averages, this is not the case in all curriculum area self-assessment reports.

Senior managers acknowledge that some variation in the quality of critical evaluation remains. The best examples include a detailed evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning, with judgements well supported by findings from internal lesson observations and student feedback. However, a few reports make no overall judgement on the quality of teaching and do not clearly identify particular areas for improvement, even when the proportion of good or better lessons observed is relatively low. In a few cases, quality improvement plans are not sufficiently sharply focused on areas for improvement identified through the report, and actions for improvement sometimes lack specific and measurable targets.

More thorough and self-critical self-assessment has contributed to reducing the previously wide variations in students' achievements between different subject areas, but managers acknowledge that too much variation remains. The revised curriculum management structure is strengthening regular performance monitoring and beginning to improve the consistency of approach. Detailed plans are in place for further management training to ensure all middle managers have the necessary skills and support to be fully effective in their roles.

Outcomes for learners

How well has the college built on improvements evident in 2009/10 to raise students' achievement further?

Reasonable progress

College success rates improved by a further three percentage points in 2010/11, and were just above the previous year's national average. Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on foundation and intermediate-level courses were above average, but remained a little below average at advanced level. Success rates for adults improved on intermediate and advanced-level courses and were well above average. Despite a

decline in pass rates at foundation level, success rates remained above the national average.

While the proportion of students completing AS-level courses improved, pass rates declined and were poor in a significant number of courses. As a result, the college has revised its AS-level provision and discontinued a number of courses in science and humanities subjects. Overall success rates on A-level courses are in line with national averages but vary considerably between subjects. Students on advanced-level vocational courses make good progress compared to their prior attainment, although the proportion achieving merit and distinction grades is a little lower than the national average. Value added data for AS- and A-level courses indicate that too many students do not make the progress predicted from their GCSE attainment.

GCSE results are broadly in line with national averages, but the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades varies between subjects. The largest numbers of students take GCSE English language and mathematics. The proportion of A* to C grades was in line with the national average in mathematics and just below average in English.

Significant improvements in the extent and quality of additional learning support have had a demonstrable impact on improving achievement for students in receipt of support, whose success rates are now better than their peers.

Quality of provision

<p>How well embedded across the college are the revised approaches to teaching and learning and to what extent has this increased the proportion of good and better teaching?</p> <p>How consistent is target setting and progress monitoring for students across the college?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has continued to invest significantly in continuing professional development with a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. The proportion of lessons judged by the college to be good or better has risen steadily over the last three years, reaching the college target of 70% in 2010/11.

The work of the learning coaches is having a positive impact through sharing best practice and in supporting staff to improve their teaching. Coaches work with all staff whose lessons were judged inadequate, providing individualised training and support, and improvement is monitored through subsequent observation. The college is planning to extend this model of coaching and re-observation to all staff whose lessons are graded satisfactory in this academic year in its bid to increase the proportion of good and better lessons to 75%.

The college has launched a revised virtual learning environment (VLE) this academic year, which brings together assignments, learning resources and students' personal learning plans. While this is at a relatively early stage of development, an increasing number of staff and students are making regular use of the VLE, for example to set

targets and review progress. In the subject areas where this is most developed, staff and students identify tangible improvements, such as improved access to, and use of, good-quality learning materials to support assignments. Students who have already started to set and record their own subject and personal targets find this a very good way to track their own progress.

Managers' monitoring of the use of these systems across the college enables them to target more effectively additional training and support for those staff who require more help and encouragement to use the new systems. Managers acknowledge that there is more work to do on improving the consistency and quality of target setting for students.

Leadership and management

How well have governors developed their role in providing appropriate levels of scrutiny and challenge on all aspects of the college's work since the last inspection? **Significant progress**

Governance in the college has improved significantly since the inspection. Governors receive much more detailed and timely reporting on all aspects of college performance and improved presentation and analysis of data has helped them scrutinise performance in more depth. The re-organisation of committee structures and the establishment of smaller working groups have increased their focus on key areas of students' performance, the quality of teaching and learning and improving college finances. For example, the use of individual governors' expertise through the finance panel has made a significant contribution to reducing the college's budget deficit and securing funding for its accommodation strategy.

Governors are now much more closely involved in the college's self-assessment process, for example through validating curriculum area self-assessments and receiving presentations from curriculum managers on the quality of provision and students' outcomes. This has significantly increased their understanding of key issues, enabling them to challenge judgements much more rigorously to ensure that self-assessment is both accurate and critical.

Governors value the open and transparent approach of the current senior management team and how they are now closely involved in key decisions, for example in developing the college's federation arrangements and revising the curriculum offer.

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