

# Gateway Sixth Form College

## Partial reinspection report

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**Name of lead inspector:** Anne Taylor HMI

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

**Address:** Colin Grundy Drive  
Leicester  
LE5 1GA

**Telephone number:** 01162 744500

## Introduction

Gateway Sixth Form College is a medium-sized sixth form college that offers courses from foundation to advanced level. The college moved from Leicester city centre to a new building in Hamilton in the north-east of Leicester in August 2009. It is not a typical sixth form college in that many students study at foundation or intermediate levels, many enter the college with low prior attainment and over half live in areas of social disadvantage. Approximately three quarters of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In 2010/11, the college enrolled 1,168 students aged 16 to 18. The mission is "Striving for excellence in all we do". Ofsted inspectors conducted a full inspection in October 2009, when overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for students, quality of provision and leadership and management were judged satisfactory. Of the two subject areas inspected, one was judged good and one, science and mathematics, was judged inadequate. The subject area of science and mathematics was reinspected in October 2010 and was judged inadequate. Reinspection monitoring visits of the college were also conducted in April and October 2010 and in May 2011. This report comprises both the reinspection of science and mathematics and the outcomes of the four monitoring visit themes.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	3

## Context

1. Approximately 700 students study in the science and mathematics subject area, of whom 45% are female and 70% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and attend full time. They study GCSE, AS and GCE A-level subjects in mathematics, sciences and psychology and BTEC applied science courses at intermediate and advanced levels.

## Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates for GCE A-level biology and chemistry and BTEC advanced applied science are very high. Success rates for GCE A-level psychology are low. Success rates for AS biology, mathematics and statistics and BTEC intermediate applied science are average, but for AS chemistry, physics and psychology are very low. All high grade pass rates are low.
- Success rates by students from a White background remain well below those from Black and Asian backgrounds.
- The proportions of GCSE high grade pass rates in biology and chemistry are very high and in mathematics and use of mathematics are high, but in psychology and science core they are very low.

- Most students make satisfactory progress compared with their prior attainment. Students taking AS statistics make good progress, but those on AS physics and GCE A-level statistics and psychology make poor progress. The proportion of students progressing to higher education decreased slightly in 2011 compared with 2010, but an increased proportion progressed to apprenticeships.
- Managers have improved their recruitment and selection and initial advice and guidance processes. Programme team leaders monitor rigorously the progress of those students enrolled under exceptional circumstances. Staff review the aptitude and suitability of new students for their original course and transfer those causing concern to alternative vocational provision.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, students enjoy varied learning activities which enable them to progress rapidly. Teachers direct challenging questions to individual students very effectively and check their understanding. In the few less effective lessons, the same students respond each time to general questions and others do not participate. Students make slow progress.
- In the best examples of the use of information and learning technology (ILT), teachers and students interact very effectively to aid learning and clarify difficult concepts. In some other cases, teachers miss ideal opportunities to use ILT to help their students understand new topics. Most teachers know their students' needs and abilities very thoroughly and provide them with very good academic support.
- Managers and teachers have improved lesson planning significantly. In the best examples, teachers place much emphasis on the individual needs of their students and the most appropriate learning activities to suit their widely different abilities. In a few less effective cases, teachers give insufficient emphasis to health and safety and functional skills and do not plan a wide range of activities.
- Target setting is very variable. Many students have identical course-based completion targets; others have very useful personalised targets, which aid their progression and development.
- Managers have made significant staff changes in the sciences. Teachers are very welcoming and helpful to, and supportive of, their students. They help to boost their confidence. Physics resources are old and often unreliable.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have improved course review and internal lesson observation systems to focus on key issues. Their development plan and improvement strategies give a high priority to improving teaching and learning. Their self assessment and action plan documents note improved and high success rates, but give less emphasis to declining and/or low success rates.

## What does Gateway Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates in psychology at all levels by ensuring that all students have the potential to succeed on the course and are fully aware of the demands of the subject.
- Decrease the difference in success rates between students from a White background and those from minority ethnic backgrounds, by determining the main reasons behind their underachievement and taking appropriate actions.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across the subject area so that all students benefit from a wide range of enjoyable learning activities, enhanced by the very effective use of information and learning technology.
- Improve the consistency of individual learning plans and target setting so that all students find the review process beneficial and strive to meet challenging targets which assist their progress.
- Improve the validity of the self-assessment report and action plans so that managers give due emphasis to areas for improvement as well as to strengths.

## Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection:

### Self-assessment and improvement planning

**What progress has the college made with its self assessment, strategic, quality and operational planning in order to drive improvement in learner outcomes?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college's strategic plan, written since the previous inspection, articulates a clear vision of an inclusive and supportive organisation valuing students. The plan highlights key areas for development on an annual basis. Measurable targets set in 2010/11 were mostly achieved; modest success rate targets were exceeded. The college is implementing a range of appropriate improvement activities, however it has yet to finalise an annual plan for 2011/12 to clarify key development areas, milestone activities or performance indicators against which to monitor progress. The current post inspection action plan and some curriculum area self assessment reports lack clearly defined measurable targets, making monitoring of progress too general. The draft 2010/11 college self assessment report aggregates data to too high a level and does not clarify strong and weak areas sufficiently. A new system of course monitoring with faculty heads and programme team leaders is expected to scrutinise course data closely, however it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative.

The revised management structure ensures greater responsibility and authority to heads of faculty and programme team leaders. The structure is appropriate; communication is open. The Principal is accessible to staff and students. Staff are clear about the college's overarching values and vision.

## Outcomes for learners

### **What progress has the college made in improving the outcomes for learners, especially learners aged 16 to 19?**

**Reasonable progress**

In 2010/11, long course success rates rose from a low base to the national rate. Both retention and pass rates improved; retention is now high. Success rates of students aged 16 to 18 on foundation level courses are around the national rate and on vocational intermediate courses they have risen substantially to above average; the proportion achieving grades A\*-C at GCSE is above the national rate. The success rates for AS subjects, a major area of work, improved significantly and for GCE A-level subjects, they rose to around the national rate. Outcomes on advanced level vocational courses remained around the national rate. High grades on advanced courses improved but remain low. While the college narrowed the gap between the best and worse performing advanced level subjects in 2010/11, too much variation persists. Students on advanced level courses make the progress expected of them overall based on their prior attainment, however their progress varies too greatly between subjects. The proportion of students progressing from AS to A2 courses improved in 2010/11 but remains low. Key skills and functional skills outcomes are good in 2010/11. The college has narrowed the achievement gaps between male and female students and between different ethnic groups.

## Quality of provision

### **What progress has the college made with ensuring that learners' needs are met in all lessons?**

**Reasonable progress**

Following recent improvements teachers have good access to accurate and reliable information about students' needs, prior attainment and individual targets. A standardised lesson plan has been introduced to encourage staff to plan for individual needs and this has been closely monitored by managers. The college has delivered a range of staff development sessions to support improvements in teaching and learning, in particular to emphasise individual needs and the regular checking of learning. While lesson plans conform to college guidelines the use of individual information to plan personalised activities is under-developed. Lesson plans identify support needs in detail, but the identification of stretch and challenge requires further work.

The college has revised its lesson observation procedures. A trained internal team of observers now conducts observations on all members of staff. Individual records are used appropriately for performance management and self assessment. The college has recently introduced learning walks to supplement the lesson observation scheme. However the production of strategic reports, including those to evaluate the impact of teaching and learning initiatives, is at an early stage of development. Students responded well to the Ofsted pre-inspection questionnaire. The vast majority of them made positive comments about the quality of teaching and learning and on how well their course meets their needs.

**What progress has the college made in identifying learners' starting points and improving consistency in the setting of appropriate and challenging targets with all learners so that they achieve to their potential?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection the college has applied more stringent entry requirements to all courses and developed a wider range of provision to enable learners to be enrolled appropriately. Streamlined arrangements identify needs and ensure support more rapidly, including the assessment of, and support for, literacy skills. An innovative 'academic boot camp' introduced in September 2011 for advanced level students improves their independent study skills. An early evaluation indicates those attending have a greater likelihood of succeeding on their main programme.

The college has prioritised the identification and support of learners at risk of not succeeding on programme since the previous inspection. This is embedded well throughout the college. Students are identified through a combination of attendance reporting and staff feedback. Staff monitor individual progress closely through tutorials and regular review weeks and track this through the Gateway Learning, Information and Data Environment (GLIDE). GLIDE also records students' long and short term targets for subjects and courses. Students are aware of their minimum target grades and how to negotiate aspirational target grades. However subject targets are frequently course driven rather than enabling students to achieve to their potential. Good practice exists but this has not been evaluated and spread.

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