

# Brooke House Sixth Form College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 133608

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

### Context and focus of visit

Brooke House Sixth Form College (BSix) is located in Hackney, one of the most deprived areas of the country. The college operates in an extremely competitive environment, with many other local post-16 providers, including academies, and a history within Hackney of students leaving the borough for their post-16 education. Despite this, the college has expanded significantly in recent years and now has around 1,500 students, mostly aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses. Although most provision is at advanced level, significant numbers of students take courses at intermediate level. Around 80% of students are of black and minority ethnic heritage, reflecting the local population. Recently the college has won several awards, including 'Outstanding Provider of the Year' from the Times Educational Supplement.

BSix was last inspected in March 2009, when the college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. The college was judged to have good leadership and management and capacity to improve.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

<b>What progress has been made in identifying and improving areas of weaker performance through effective quality assurance procedures?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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Over the last three years, the college has made significant progress in identifying where performance has been weak and taking appropriate and rapid steps to improve it. Self-assessment is rigorous and realistic, and key areas for improvement are identified and kept under regular review. In nearly all subjects and courses, appropriate action has been taken to tackle weaknesses, and this has had a positive impact on students' outcomes. Three years ago performance was weak in several areas of the college; now, only small pockets of weaker performance remain. Effective quality assurance procedures have included internal quality reviews, a good lesson observation scheme and highly effective staff development to improve teaching and learning, and decisive performance management where appropriate. After a period of significant staff turnover at the college, staffing is now stable. The improved reputation of the college has helped it to attract teachers of a high calibre, and most teaching is now good or better.

#### Outcomes for learners

<b>What progress has been made in improving outcomes for students?</b>	<b>Significant progress</b>
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After a steady but discernible improvement in the proportion of students who completed their courses successfully between 2007/08 and 2009/10, in 2010/11

success rates on long courses rose very significantly from 71% to 78%. Although this is still below the national average for sixth form colleges, the gap between BSix's performance and that of sixth form colleges nationally is closing rapidly. In the context in which the college works, this is a considerable achievement. Students taking advanced-level courses enter the college with significantly lower prior attainment, on average, than is typical in sixth form colleges; the college also welcomes students with no previous educational success on foundation-level programmes. The college is now very close to the high national average success rate for those completing full A-level courses. The proportion of students who achieve high grades on advanced-level vocational qualifications is very high. However, on AS- and A-level courses, as the college recognises, not enough students are achieving grades A or B. Those taking GCSE English achieve very well; results are lower in GCSE mathematics. In comparison with their prior attainment, students make very good progress, particularly on vocational qualifications. Crucially, the college's efforts to keep a higher proportion of students on their courses until they have finished are making a difference; retention rates have risen significantly. Students enjoy the college and their lessons. Over the last three years the culture of the college has been gradually transformed. Students and staff report that both behaviour and attitudes have improved significantly, and this has led to a more purposeful, enjoyable learning environment. As senior leaders recognise, there are still some issues to tackle – for example, poor punctuality to lessons, and some variation in students' motivation – before the college's ambition of being an excellent provider of sixth form education can be realised fully.

**How much progress has been made in securing sustained improvement in AS-level success rates?**

**Reasonable progress**

Raising success rates at AS level has been the most significant challenge facing the college. Three years ago, the AS-level success rate was a very poor 59%. However, in 2009/10 this rose significantly to 68%. In 2010/11 a more modest rise to 71% confirmed that progress was still being made. Although this figure is still well below the national average of 79%, current data, for example from January module exams, give some confidence that the rate will rise again in 2011/12. The college's policy of ensuring that all students on AS-level courses take four subjects, unless there are exceptional circumstances, is designed to raise aspirations and ensure that opportunities for higher education applications are maximised. The college recognises that, for some students, this is challenging, and they do not succeed in all four subjects.

**How much progress has been made in ensuring that efforts to raise aspirations through a broad range of initiatives are having an impact in respect both of students' achievements and their destinations?**

**Significant progress**

The college has invested much time and effort in helping to raise students' aspirations, to very good effect. Raising students' ambitions provides a key context for students' and teachers' life in the college and has an impact upon students in a wide variety of ways. It ranges across the college's efforts to widen the participation of students, securing the success of 'at risk' students, preparing students for the world of work and improving the prospect of progression to higher education for an increasing number.

Through very effective strategies to market the college, built very much around the improving success of students, participation has been widened. Many more students now attend the college, and it has recovered its position as a key local provider for post-16 education. The college has re-modelled its arrangements to support students, both paying attention to those 'at risk' and those that may be under-achieving. The work of the new Student Achievement Centre provides a key focus for activity, which engages all teachers.

The 'Raising Aspirations' programme, initially around collaboration with Pembroke College, Oxford, has developed a highly successful model to further the progression of students to higher education, now extending to 15 universities and across a good range of subjects. Students benefit from organised visits to top universities, and within the college one room has been designed to replicate an Oxford don's study. The number and percentages of students applying and then progressing to higher education have increased significantly in recent years. Overall progression to higher education was 71% in 2011, as compared with 64% the previous year. The numbers going to 'Russell Group' universities are significantly improved.

BSeven, the extended college, provides an unusually wide range of well-supported activities to encourage and facilitate students' understanding of their potential. It also leads on promoting wider student understanding of the world of work, complementing the parallel activities in relation to higher education.

### **Quality of provision**

**How much progress has been made in ensuring that the college's lesson observation scheme and associated activities lead to improvements in teaching and learning?**

**Significant progress**

Further improving teaching and learning is a key objective for the college. Progress in this is supported by rigorous and extensive arrangements to help teachers to improve the quality of lessons and to check on the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers comment positively on the ways in which they are helped to improve;

something which they keenly want to do. The outcomes of the college's lesson observation scheme show that teaching and learning have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The percentage of lessons graded good or better rose from 53% in 2008/09 to 72% in 2009/10, accompanied by a marked reduction in lessons judged inadequate. This trend of improvement continues in the current academic year, with 74% of the lessons observed to date graded as good or better. Inspection evidence shows that the college has an accurate view of the quality of learning in lessons. To help overcome potential inflation of lesson grades, the college now uses internal quality reviews for each department, with trained inspectors carrying out observations. Inspection by students, who are trained thoroughly to carry out the role, has been introduced and makes a valuable contribution to reviews of the quality of provision.

Particularly helpful in developing an understanding of how to improve teaching and learning is the 'Ofsted training' delivered to key managers and some teachers, to help them better understand judgements made at inspection, including those about lessons. This is to be extended to all teachers. A significant amount of other valuable training is undertaken. Prompted by one such activity, on assessment for learning, the role of 'teacher learning advocate' has been introduced. This has created a community of expert practitioners, currently focused on assessment for learning, but capable of influencing a range of other key aspects of teaching and learning.

**How much progress has been made in ensuring that student monitoring systems in all their guises are having sufficient and consistent impact in improving retention, attendance and progress?** **Reasonable progress**

For much of its existence, the college has struggled to ensure that students attend all their lessons, and that they stay on their courses until the end. College staff work tremendously hard to support students to attend and complete their course, and they are gradually winning the struggle: attendance at lessons is improving, and the proportion of students who complete their courses is rising. Teachers, tutors and key support staff work in unison to ensure that students recognise their obligations in respect of attendance, and in supporting students to stay at college. The quality of information available to staff and middle managers to monitor students' attendance and punctuality has improved, and electronic records now provide clear overviews of attendance by individual students and groups. Liaison with parents and carers, and with other agencies that have contact with students' lives, is good. College staff have been less successful in their efforts to persuade all students to attend their lessons punctually: too often, poor punctuality means that it is difficult for teachers to get lessons off to a crisp start.

The monitoring of students' academic progress is less consistently effective. Electronic systems are in their infancy, and do not involve students themselves sufficiently in setting targets. The use of target setting on A- and AS-level courses is underdeveloped; although students are set targets, reviews of progress towards

meeting these targets are patchy. Over the last three years the college's prime focus has been on ensuring students stay and achieve. For example, extra classes are compulsory for those at risk of failing. However, not enough attention is being paid at the moment to students who are not at risk of failing, but are underperforming; for example, students who are heading towards a grade C or D at A or AS level when they have the potential to achieve a grade A or B. The college plans to develop more rigorous target-setting data based on value-added information, for use from September 2012.

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