

# Totton College

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130699

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

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## Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

### Context and focus of visit

Totton College is a large sixth form college located in Totton, near the New Forest and Southampton, in Hampshire. The college has approximately 1,400 full-time learners, 900 part-time learners and 180 apprentices. Most full-time learners are aged 16 to 18. The prior attainment at GCSE of these learners on entry to the college is lower than the national average for sixth form colleges. The proportion of learners gaining A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, at the end of Key Stage 4 in Hampshire is higher than the national average. Most learners aged 16 to 18 study at advanced level. The largest subject areas, by way of numbers of learners, are visual and performing arts and media, and science and mathematics.

At the last inspection in September 2011, inspectors judged overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, and leadership and management to be inadequate. One of the four subject areas inspected, science and mathematics, was inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

**What progress is Totton College making in ensuring that quality assurance is leading to a more realistic and self-critical insight into performance and that lesson observation is bringing about secure improvements to teaching and learning?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection, the self-assessment process was insufficiently self-critical to drive improvement. Lesson observations lacked rigour and consistency. The college's post-inspection action plan shows a detailed and insightful examination of the 'root causes' of the issues that the college is tackling from the last inspection. Planned actions are sharply focused, measurable and prioritised; leaders and managers monitor progress frequently and precisely. However, the college has made insufficient progress in improving the inadequate provision in science and mathematics. The college has set a clear agenda for the future development of quality improvement processes, including self-assessment.

The revised lesson observation process is appropriately focused on learning, with clearly specified criteria. Its impact is visible in the improvements seen in the follow-up observations for teachers, for whom support and development have been provided. In the lessons observed jointly with inspectors, college observers provided an accurate and astute view of the strengths and areas for improvement of the lessons, with a sharp focus on learning and progress. Arrangements to share good practice and to enable teachers to work on previously-identified areas for improvement are developing well. However, inspectors' scrutiny of completed lesson observation documentation showed that not all observers are as yet fully focused on

interpreting lessons according to the criteria, and that actions for improvement are not always sufficiently precise to provide a clear plan of improvement for teachers.

### **Outcomes for learners**

**What progress is Totton College making in improving outcomes for learners?**

**Reasonable progress**

Outcomes for learners were inadequate at the last inspection, and in particular for learners aged 16 to 18 whose success rates in AS levels and progression into A levels were low. Learners' progress from their starting points on entry to advanced level study was inconsistent across the range of subject areas, and in AS levels overall their progress was below average. The college's use of its available performance data has improved since the last inspection, with the regular provision of information to managers on the key performance indicators of learners' performance.

The impact of college strategies to improve success rates for the current academic year is visible in a larger proportion of learners remaining on programme, compared to the same time last year, across all long courses at different levels, and in the college's AS-level and A-level courses. The college has made prudent predictions for learners' success for the end of the current academic year based on last year's pass rates – which were significantly below the national average at AS level. However, it is too soon for inspectors to assess fully the impact of these strategies on success rates; learners have not yet completed their courses.

### **Quality of provision**

**What progress is Totton College making in ensuring that feedback on assessment and target-setting arrangements for individual learners are helping them to achieve their full potential?**

**Reasonable progress**

The use of target setting to raise learners' aspiration and optimise their attainment was inconsistent at the last inspection. Not all learners received clear and helpful guidance on how to improve their work. Learners report improved feedback on their performance and progress, and have a clearer understanding of what they need to do improve. The developing use of the electronic mark book is enabling a clearer and more timely overview of learners' performance. The proportion of learners on track to achieve or exceed their minimum target grades for the current academic year is higher than at the same point last year. However, as the college recognises, the quality and frequency of feedback on learners' performance and progress is inconsistent across the range of subject areas.

**What progress is Totton College making in ensuring that learners' individual programmes of study meet their needs and aspirations more precisely and provide an appropriate level of challenge?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the time of the last inspection, which took place when the current academic year had already begun, the range of courses learners studied led to highly individualised programmes which provided broad experience, but sometimes resulted in a lack of focus on meaningful progression routes. The college has rationalised the curriculum offer for the 2012/13 academic year, to ensure that the combination of courses learners study is more coherent and better tailored to their needs and aspirations. Entry requirements to advanced level study for the 2012/13 academic year are more reflective of standard practice in sixth form colleges, in order to ensure that learners are better equipped to be successful at this level.

### **Leadership and management**

**What progress has Totton College made in enabling governors to fulfil their roles more fully and in particular to hold managers to account for learners' performance?**

**Significant progress**

Since the last inspection, the governing body has restructured its committees to ensure that they can focus soundly and effectively on specific aspects of college performance whilst maintaining its statutory duties. The Principal and new clerk to the governing body provide more robust and understandable information and data at a variety of aggregated levels, enabling the comparison of college performance with that of the sector as a whole. An appropriate level of detail enables governors to challenge senior managers confidently, to ensure that the college is focused on improving and developing its provision. Governors are fully aware of the key aspects that the college needs to improve.

Governors are fully involved in 'Futures 15' – the three-year strategic plan for the college – and in setting challenging, but realistic, overall and milestone targets. They have been fully instrumental in ensuring that the college restructuring is based on sound reasons and will lead to improvements. The governing body has carried out a full skills audit and training needs analysis of its members. These have informed effectively the development of criteria for future appointments to the board and a training plan for the coming year.

**What progress is Totton College making in improving inadequate provision in science and mathematics?**

**Insufficient progress**

The science department has been slow to respond effectively to the outcomes from the last inspection. Science staff consider that the poor outcomes for learners are primarily due to learners' ability on their courses; they have consequently focused on providing extra learning materials for the current learners and have adopted the use of the effective 'SMART Study' sessions introduced by mathematics staff during the previous year. However, the department has not given sufficient priority to planning to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Although senior managers recognised this at quality improvement panels, the department has still been too slow to take appropriate action.

Although mathematics and science subject areas are based in the same department, they operate independently. Science staff have not capitalised sufficiently on some of the good practice developed and demonstrated within the mathematics section, for example, in the use of learner tracking sheets. The provision of data on the performance of learners has improved in the current year, but too many learners in advanced science are not always clear about the progress they are making towards their qualifications. The setting and marking of written work are inconsistent in effectiveness, as it is not always made clear to learners what they need to do to improve.

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