

St Vincent College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

St Vincent College is a small sixth form college in Gosport, Hampshire. In 2010/11, there were 1,059 full-time students, 648 part-time students and 1,196 students on adult and community programmes. The college provides courses in a range of AS- and A-level subjects and vocational programmes and there is a significant cohort of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most students who declare their heritage identify themselves as White British.

The previous inspection, in November 2011, judged the college's overall effectiveness to be satisfactory. Outcomes for students, the quality of provision, leadership and management and the capacity to improve were also satisfactory. Provision in the visual and performing arts was satisfactory, but provision in science and mathematics was inadequate.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has St Vincent College made in developing quality improvement procedures and the self-assessment process since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

Senior managers have a self-critical approach to self-assessment and the process is inclusive of all staff. Managers have continued to revise and strengthen the college's approach to quality assurance. The views of students are now collected more systematically across the college and they feed into the quality assurance processes well, leading to changes and improvements where appropriate. Comprehensive quality reviews of subject areas are carried out by the college's quality review team and by external colleagues from local colleges working alongside college staff. These reviews lead to detailed reports, but specific actions to remedy identified weaknesses following external reviews are not always put in place in a timely manner. Action plans for courses that are underperforming include appropriate measures to drive forward improvements, such as earlier and more stringent assessment for students. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these quality improvement actions on raising students' outcomes and the quality of provision.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has St Vincent College made in improving students' outcomes since the previous inspection?

Reasonable progress

Outcomes for students were judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Managers have set up new procedures for predicting the achievement of students, based on the students' current levels of performance and their standard of work. These predictions indicate an overall increase in achievement rates for 2011/12, particularly in subject areas that underperformed last year, such as AS levels and

intermediate level vocational programmes. College data suggest that the current in-year retention rates of students are higher at all levels than they were last year, with a particular improvement for students aged 16 to 18 on intermediate level courses. Students' attendance rates during the current academic year have remained much the same as last year at around 85%, but a lack of punctuality is having an adverse impact on teaching and learning in some subject areas.

Quality of provision

How much progress has St Vincent College made to increase the effective use of the college's virtual learning environment to motivate and enthuse all students? **Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection identified that use of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) was underdeveloped. Progress has been made to extend the use of the VLE in a number of subjects and staff have worked well with colleagues from the local partnerships of colleges to develop systems that encourage students to use the VLE. For example, science and mathematics teachers have participated in an effective project to cascade its use throughout the department and the rest of the college.

A comprehensive staff development programme on the use of the VLE has begun and will continue throughout the academic year. Student feedback on the effectiveness of the VLE is more positive for a number of subject areas than in the past. The availability of information and learning technology (ILT) resources in the college has increased. However, use of the VLE is not yet covered during the induction programme for students or encouraged sufficiently in all subject areas.

How much progress have students made in meeting the challenging targets and the high expectations set by their teachers? **Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection judged that the college provides satisfactory pastoral care and academic support for students, but highlighted that a significant number of students do not have clear targets to help them to improve their work and ensure they make good progress. Staff have now introduced simplified target grades for intermediate and advanced level students based on their GCSE scores. After consultation between teachers and students, aspirational target grades are also agreed. Less focus is given to the recording of short- and mid-term targets. Students have informal short-term targets in the form of written feedback on their work and teachers monitor students' progress against these targets, although they are not always recorded anywhere except on the students' work. Other groups of students, particularly adults including those in higher education, students with moderate and severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and students not previously engaged in education, employment or training, have a strong and well-established system of rigorous target-setting and monitoring.

Teachers encourage and support students well when making university applications. Students particularly value the detailed information and guidance they receive about university choices.

Leadership and management

How much progress have managers made in setting and meeting ambitious performance targets for their courses?

Reasonable progress

Targets for students' outcomes are now established for all courses across the college. These have been simplified, with an overall minimum success rate target of 80% for all courses, except for A-level subjects where it is 95%. Since the previous inspection, detailed discussions between managers and staff now also lead to predicted success rates for each course, but it is too soon to see whether these predictions are accurate.

To provide more accountability among teachers for the results of the students they teach, the sharing of teaching groups by teachers is discouraged wherever possible. Managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning more regularly through frequent unannounced 'drop-ins' to lessons, which gives them more opportunity to discuss details of individual students' progress. A new format for a more focussed professional review of teaching staff has now been developed and is being implemented from June 2012.

How much progress has St Vincent College made in improving the quality of provision in science and mathematics?

Reasonable progress

Science and mathematics provision was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Staff have tackled the areas for improvement recommended in the report systematically. A detailed action plan is monitored regularly. Science and mathematics staff have engaged in a broad range of training activities and participated in events with staff from other local colleges to share good practice. More equipment for ILT has been purchased and further learning resources are uploaded to the college's VLE that enliven teaching and learning.

Changes in staffing and reorganisation of the curriculum have resulted in positive feedback from students and improved predicted success rates overall. Results for AS examinations taken in January 2012 in mathematics show an improvement compared to the previous year, but this was not the case for students taking biology and chemistry examinations.

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