

Middlesbrough College

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Patrick Geraghty HMI

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Address: Dock Street
Middlesbrough
Cleveland
TS2 1AD

Telephone number: 01642 333333

Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

In September 2013, the college started to offer full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-olds to enable students to complete a Key Stage 4 equivalent programme as an alternative to school or home-based education. This monitoring visit examined the progress made to date against the themes identified in this report and focused solely on the new 14 to 16 full-time provision.

At the time of the visit, 24 students were enrolled from one local secondary school and from the local pupil referral unit within the unitary authority and borough council of Middlesbrough. The majority of students have a history of poor attendance during their Key Stage 3 education. Students have two distinctive pathways. Thirteen students were enrolled from one local secondary school and follow a curriculum focused on a BTEC catering pathway. Eleven other students were enrolled from the local pupil referral unit and follow a range of vocational pathways offered through a distinctive alternative curriculum. Eighty-three per cent of the students enrolled are eligible for the pupil premium.

Themes

What progress has the college made in implementing clear admissions and exclusion policies for its 14 to 16 provision?

Significant

The college has well-defined enrolment procedures and processes. The admissions policy is clear and understood fully by students, college staff and parents/carers. Potential students and their parents or carers are well informed about admissions and transition processes through telephone calls, information leaflets, letters and visits to the college. The admissions policy was designed in consultation with the one partnership secondary school, the pupil referral unit and shared with the local authority. As a result of the experiences of the first sixth months, procedures have been reviewed and appropriate changes made. Staff have a strong focus on systems and mechanisms to support and nurture students through the initial first days on their courses. The initial months of the course proved a challenging time, however, strong staff commitment and well-designed procedures have supported the students' transition effectively to a college environment. Parents and carers have signed appropriate consent and indemnity forms. A strong and supportive partnership has evolved with the local high school, the pupil referral unit and the local authority. However, college managers agree that there is a need to improve the acquisition of student data on prior attainment and their historical educational experiences before enrolment.

A growing strength of this provision is how well the college is working to establish supportive links with parents and carers; the majority of these now respond to college communications and attend college events. The college acknowledges that further work is required to embed and sustain this parental and carer involvement and support.

From the inception of the courses, the college established a clear discipline and behaviour policy which has also been reviewed and changed in the light of experience. It is shared and understood by students and their parents or carers. Crucially, it is implemented with consistency across all provision. Students were involved in the design of aspects of these policies and procedures and from an early stage were encouraged to accept responsibility for their behaviour and conduct. Exclusion policies are clear and understood by students, parents and carers, and staff. The college has strong anti-bullying and anti-social behaviour policies which are embedded in the curriculum and tutorial provision.

What progress has the college made in providing sufficient, appropriately qualified staff to lead and teach the provision and to support the learners?

Significant

All but one teacher has qualified teacher status and that individual will achieve that by the end of the current academic year. A number of teachers, tutors and teaching assistants have secondary school experience. All teachers have relevant subject and vocational experience and expertise. Teachers on the vocational courses have industrial and work-related experience which has added an additional dimension to the building of stronger students' aspirations. Many students have developed next step qualification goals which have enhanced their current work and conduct. The college has been particularly acute in reviewing provision and progress speedily, identifying weaknesses and tackling them quickly. New staff appointments to the management and teaching of the provision during the first few months have strengthened the quality of provision and the growing positive attitude of students to learning.

Staff have received effective training to deal with challenging behaviour and a variety of potential individual students' needs. The college has effective systems to develop teachers' skills in positive learning strategies and coaching techniques. Team meetings review students' learning needs and progress. The college has many arrangements for staff to share good practice college-wide. However, managers acknowledge that more opportunities for teachers and tutors to share good practice in teaching and learning approaches for the 14 to 16 cohort are required. Teachers benefit from a wide range of highly skilled support staff to help them with the additional learning needs of students. All support staff have prior experience of working with young people in a support capacity.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that the curriculum is sufficiently broad and covers all statutory subjects?**Reasonable**

Students follow one of two pathways. Each pathway ensures that students have appropriate provision in English, mathematics and science. Pathways also provide a range of appropriate vocational subjects and two weekly sessions of physical education. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is taught through tutorial groups. The college has devised a well-structured programme covering a wide range of topics including building communication skills, understanding and developing relationships, citizenship awareness and promoting safety consciousness. Diversity is celebrated through a range of themed topics linked to national and international religious, celebratory and cultural events. Healthy lifestyles are promoted. Staff encourage students to develop entrepreneurial skills and contribute to charitable work through fund-raising events at local Christmas markets. A wide range of guest speakers promote understanding in specific topics including substance misuse, antisocial behaviour and debt management. Students display increased understanding of the benefits of following rules and are beginning to recognise the value of education in improving life chances. While aspects of religious education and the exploration of value systems are included in the tutorial programme, managers acknowledges that this area requires further development.

What progress has the college made in quality assuring and evaluating all aspects of the provision for continuous improvement?**Significant**

Well-focused and effective quality assurance processes are in place to evaluate the quality of provision. Course reviews are detailed and regular. The college takes speedy action to tackle identified areas of weakness. Staff monitor students' progress thoroughly. At enrolment, initial assessment tests in English and mathematics gave a clear picture of students' levels and where additional support was required. Progress tracking is thorough and most recent data indicate that all but a few students have made progress and that many have made significant progress set against their starting points. Thorough monitoring takes place of the progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium. Students see the college as offering a supportive, inclusive and safe environment. Senior leaders are highly effective in planning and implementing improvement strategies and at deploying suitable and committed staff. The vice-chair of the college governors is the link governor to the 14 to 16 provision and visits the unit on a regular basis.

Most students understand the progress they have made and their current targets. These targets are displayed within classrooms and students, using them, were able to explain how they had progressed in English, mathematics, science and the vocational subjects. Many students are now taking a pride in the progress they have made since starting their pathway.

The college has well-developed electronic systems to collate relevant information to inform on students' progress. All staff have the opportunity to add positive comments or raise issues about an individual student's progress, attitude and behaviour on the student information portal. The system also provides useful information on whether students are on track to achieve each of their qualification aims and on both recent and overall attendance and punctuality. Students' attendance, set against their historical record, has improved significantly. The electronic records system is used to include details on social needs and additional learning support. The system is used well to collate the views of all tutors within termly reports on students' progress to inform parents and carers, who can access the reports through a web portal. The college has established effective communications to ascertain the views of both students and their parents and carers. Students aged 14 to 16 have a representative on the college's student council and through this have been responsible for initiating ideas which have led to changes in practice and rules.

What progress has the college made in providing learners with sufficient student care, guidance and support, including the implementation of a behaviour policy appropriate for learners aged 14 to 16?

Significant

Students have significant social and personal problems. Many have a historically poor attendance, behavioural and academic record at school. The college has in place effective support mechanisms. Tutors, support workers and teachers know their students well and are increasingly trusted by them. While there are occasional examples of disruptive behaviour, these are dealt with quickly and effectively and in a manner that does not interrupt the learning of others. Teaching assistants have mobile phone contact with parents and carers and alert them to any attendance and behavioural issues as well as to examples of good performance and achievement. Attendance rates for many students have improved significantly. Rewards are used well to acknowledge good achievement and performance.

Tutors and in-class teaching assistants work very well together to ensure that students are fully supported throughout teaching sessions and any prospective issues are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Teaching assistants work with autonomy in making key decisions on how best to support students in lessons. All support staff have prior experience of working with young people in a support capacity.

The standards of behaviour, attendance, attitudes to learning and the need for the wearing of identity badges are clear to students. The behaviour policy has been reviewed in the light of experience and in preparation for an expansion of student numbers next year. Managers have ensured that consistency in the application of the behaviour and conduct codes are embedded across all provision.

Challenging behaviour by students is now well managed. The initial few weeks presented many challenges for teachers, tutors and managers. Much support and effort has gone into establishing better behaviour and more positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is now good in many lessons. Almost all of the current students have expressed an intention to return to learning to follow vocational courses upon completion of their current studies. The college is considering new approaches to how best to remain in contact with students and their parents or carers over the summer break to ensure retained enthusiasm for learning and adherence to college codes of conduct upon their return.

Has the college implemented appropriate measures to ensure that all learners are reasonably safeguarded and that it meets its statutory duty for safeguarding in relation to learners of this age group?

Yes

The college complies with its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and child protection legislation. The importance of health and safety is reinforced throughout the locations that students use. Risk assessments in vocational workshops are thorough and appropriate. The college has appropriate arrangements for safer recruitment. The discipline policy has been redrafted specifically to meet the needs of younger students following lessons learned during the first term.

Students feel safe within and around the college site. Students have a dedicated and secure classroom base and are well supervised within the vocational workshops and other subject locations. They meet each morning within their classroom base as well as having breaks, tutorials and assembly within these areas. At present, they do not have a dedicated common room and the college recognises this as a need to be tackled urgently.

The tutorial programme includes topics that develop students' understanding and heighten their awareness of personal safety, including the safe use of the internet. A college zero tolerance policy on bullying and harassment is enforced strictly. Students are confident that they can approach tutors and teachers on issues which are concerning them. When incidences of bullying and harassment occur, students say they are dealt with quickly.

Strengths and areas of weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

In the vast majority of lessons observed, behaviour was good. In a few lessons where there were examples of some low level, disruptive behaviour, effective strategies were applied to ensure that the disruption to learning was limited.

Teaching and learning sessions are planned and structured well and build on previous learning. Well-developed resources support learning.

Staff promote literacy and numeracy well in all lessons. Recapping on subject terminology is applied consistently throughout the curriculum. Staff encourage students to develop their writing skills and in doing so to evidence new vocabulary. Within classrooms, noticeboards have valuable information displayed such as target grades but too few have examples of students' work.

Teachers use information and learning technologies (ILT) well within the classroom to promote, consolidate and reinforce learning. For example, in a mathematics class ILT was used particularly well to help students understand coordinate systems and their use in finding midpoints or the coordinates of a fourth vertex. Students were able to use this understanding to develop and demonstrate skills in map reading.

Students demonstrated good progress in reading and comprehension in English. All students were engaged and willing to read aloud to the class, write keywords or answers on the whiteboard and engage in challenging question and answer sessions. Many were developing a new curiosity for words and language and enjoyed the challenge that the learning activities offered them.

Students work well independently, in pairs and in groups. Strategies to keep students fully engaged in their learning are generally effective. Teaching assistants are very well used for one-to-one support and to promote focused learning activities. However, additional and extension work activities too often focus on the quantity of work done by the more able students rather than increasing the levels of challenge presented by that work.

Staff mark assessments frequently. The assessment of students' written work does not always include the correction of punctuation, spelling and grammar mistakes. Marking does not always give pointers to the next steps to improvement or demonstrate how improvement points made were followed up and consolidated by students in their practice.

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M1 2WD

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