

# Hartlepool Sixth Form College

## First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130568

**Name of lead inspector:** Ruth James HMI

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**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

**Address:** Blakelock Road  
Hartlepool  
TS25 5PF

**Telephone number:** 01429 294444

## **Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Hartlepool Sixth Form College following publication of the inspection report on 13 November 2014 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

### **Themes**

#### **Improvement in outcomes for students on AS- and A-level courses**

The new Principal has made clear his determination to drive through wide-ranging improvements to accelerate student progress and raise attainment. High expectations are explicit and senior leaders are clearly committed to ensuring that plans are implemented effectively. A number of strategies to improve outcomes had already been put in place from the start of this academic year. There are early signs of these having a positive impact. For example, retention has improved compared with the position at the same time last year.

A new and more rigorous focus on attendance and punctuality is already resulting in improvement. New and more-streamlined processes ensure absences are identified and reported immediately. All teachers are now more focused on using the new management information system to monitor patterns of attendance and tackle them promptly. Attendance has improved compared with the same period last year. The presence of senior leaders at the college entrance monitoring arrival times has resulted in a significant improvement in punctuality. Senior leaders are also present in the corridors at lesson change over times to ensure students get to lessons on time.

In September 2014 all heads of department met with the Principal individually to explain their results and identify key issues that resulted in poor outcomes. They have subsequently been given the task of making significant improvements through performance monitoring of students and individual teachers. Performance directors are taking a pro-active and leading role in supporting and challenging heads of department and teachers in underperforming areas with frequent meetings to review student progress, attendance and retention.

A system has been established to monitor academic performance (MAP) at five points during the year, and compare current grade with target grade based on prior attainment. Senior leaders monitor progress data carefully and review with heads of department to ensure that all teachers are providing targeted support to students at risk of not reaching their target grade.

Arrangements to support students who are underachieving have been formalised and no longer rely on informal or ad hoc arrangements. For example, students who have difficulty keeping up with work make use of a directed study area supervised by a teacher. Academic support tutorials are run three times a week by subject teachers to provide additional help to those who need it or those who are underachieving.

Resource issues have been addressed where these were perceived as barriers to achievement. For example, additional equipment has been purchased for product design. AS-science students now study core mathematics to support the mathematical elements of their science work.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Use the data from MAP points to ensure that all underachieving students are identified and appropriate support strategies are put in place to raise their achievement.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the academic support arrangements, such as directed study and academic support tutorials, to ensure students' progress is accelerated.
- Given the historic emphasis on pass rates rather than grades, ensure that appropriate strategies are in place to support those with high grade targets who are at risk of not attaining these.
- Continue to monitor punctuality, attendance and retention and follow up rigorously.

### **Improvement in teaching and learning**

Prior to the inspection a programme of improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment had already commenced. All teachers were informed of the need to improve their skills to ensure significantly better outcomes for students. All staff are expected to plan lessons and to document teaching, learning and assessment through lesson plans or detailed schemes of work.

The lesson observation scheme has been refined to incorporate unannounced observations, three times a year. This is supplemented by work scrutiny and student focus groups to provide a more holistic approach to evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The number of observers has been reduced to a small, well-trained team to improve consistency of judgements. Follow up of observations that raise concerns is rapid, with re-observation following development work, and more stringent action where there is not enough improvement. Lesson observations include a focus on English and mathematics. Actions have been taken to support teachers, share best practice and to broaden their range of learning

strategies through linking with other teachers. Observation data are used to identify good practice and to pair staff to enable good practice to be shared particularly where a development need has been identified. All teachers are alerted to particular examples of good practice noted during observations. Senior staff carry out learning walks based upon the themes emerging from lesson observations. These themes are also being used to identify key developmental needs.

Focused subject and department reviews and development work using consultant expertise have taken place in some areas and are planned for others. The college is developing links with good and outstanding departments in other colleges to share good practice. Processes to recruit teachers are strongly focused on good classroom practice.

A number of staff development activities have taken place and more are planned. Since the inspection teachers have had training in a recognised value-added system and how it can be used to improve students' progress. Additional activities are planned for next term. Resources to help teachers improve their practice are shared on the college network.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that all observations of teaching, learning and assessment are carried out using the new processes. Make sure that the outcomes of these observations are used to produce individual staff development plans that are monitored regularly and lead to clear improvements in all lessons, particularly better planning of learning to ensure lessons are more personalised, and challenge learners of all abilities to make good progress.
- Use the outcomes of lesson observations to identify generic development activities and ensure that these involve all teachers across the college, and are not solely focused on individual development needs.
- Devise a strategy to develop students' mathematics skills through subject lessons and monitor and evaluate this to ensure it is effective.
- Roll out the planned coaching and peer-observation programme to staff to develop a culture of a learning community.
- Continue to develop strategies to share good practice more widely across the college.

### **Improvement in assessment and progress tracking**

A systematic overhaul of the tracking and monitoring of student progress has been implemented since September 2014. The new process is more immediate and collates all information about students' attendance, punctuality and progress in one place. The new IT based system enables staff and students to monitor progress.

Parents also have access to relevant information. The MAP system allows formal recording of students' current grades at five assessment points during the academic year. Comparisons between current grade and target grade (based on prior attainment) show the numbers of students who are on track to achieve their target grade or above, and those who are not. Actions are planned to support the underachievers to enable them to catch up. Performance directors work closely with teachers and heads of department to ensure that this is followed up effectively. Progress reviews have been introduced with all curriculum area leaders to ensure accountability. Meetings take place each term which focus upon student retention, attendance, MAP assessment, students identified as being at risk of not achieving, English and mathematics attendance, and staffing.

Academic support tutorials have a strong focus on supporting students who need additional help or who are underachieving. Teachers are able to compel students to attend where a need has been identified. Senior leaders are now mentoring small groups of students identified as most at risk because of attendance, punctuality, behaviour or performance. They meet with them regularly on an individual basis, to set detailed and challenging targets for improvement. This challenge is combined with scrutiny of any barriers to learning and support for the student to solve these problems. New arrangements for a dedicated study zone have been implemented. The area is staffed at all times to monitor behaviour and to provide support on key aspects of learning, such as research, referencing and essay writing. Students can be referred to use this zone, for example, those students who come from homes without access to the internet. Laptops are available for students to borrow for both the short and medium term. Students who do not have the required software on their computer are provided with this free of charge.

Assessment for vocational courses is now planned using a semester structure. Delivery of units, assignments and assessments is through this framework, meaning students complete whole units in a shorter space of time, rather than having many assignments and units running throughout the year. Newly established progression panels focus on the quality of students work, attendance, punctuality, and unit and assignment completion.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that the MAP system is applied rigorously to all students including students on level 2 courses and students on vocational courses. Develop and implement rigorously the new programme of progression panels to ensure that the progress of all students, particularly level 2 and vocational students is closely tracked and monitored.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of assessments to ensure that grades recorded on the MAP system are realistic and provide an accurate picture of student performance at the given points.

- Ensure that academic support tutorials are carefully planned to meet the needs of individual students needing support, for example, by providing different sessions for those on different course levels or aiming for very different grades.

## **Improvement in advice and guidance**

Entry criteria have been clarified to ensure that students have appropriate qualifications prior to the start of their courses so that they are in a position to make progress and successfully complete the qualifications. The information communicated to students in local high schools has been improved through assemblies led by college staff, careers guidance interviews and documents, such as the college prospectus. Improved transition arrangements are planned for Year 11 school leavers prior to enrolling at college. The summer term bridging programme has been extended to ensure that prospective students have plenty of information, advice and guidance about their chosen sixth-form courses.

A review of the mathematics qualifications offered for those who do not have a GCSE grade C or above has led to changes in the qualifications now offered. Depending on GCSE grade students are now enrolled on either the GCSE course or a suitable stepping stone to GCSE.

Since the inspection a higher profile has been given to progression opportunities for apprenticeships, and employment and training for those students who are not planning to go into higher education.

## **Priorities for improvement**

- In the light of the fact that occasionally students have enrolled onto courses this year without meeting the full entry criteria, ensure that all staff involved understand the criteria and the reasons for the criteria so that appropriate advice is given in future. Ensure that where there are exceptional circumstances where entry criteria are not met students are referred to key designated senior staff for a decision about enrolment.
- Continue to develop careers guidance opportunities for those students who do not wish to apply to university.
- Ensure that level 2 students are on programmes that lead to progression into their identified career pathway, either through higher learning, employment or apprenticeships.
- Continue to monitor and review entry criteria in the light of national data and student outcomes to ensure that advice is well-informed and students are well placed to succeed.

## **Improvement in governance and quality assurance arrangements**

The post-inspection plan is clear about the actions to be taken to drive improvements and includes specific measurable targets for student outcomes at the end to the year, but it is not specific about interim targets.

The performance management system is being strengthened with clear targets relating to student outcomes for senior staff. There are plans to extend this to heads of department and teachers.

Governors are very clear about the need to make significant and rapid changes to their role and effectiveness as governors. A planned development programme has been established and delivery will begin early next term. Governors are highly committed to improvement. They are now working much more closely with senior managers and the Principal to develop a far better understanding of the progress of students, the performance of staff and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college. Regular updates, five times a year via a dashboard, are provided by the Principal to the governors to ensure that progress and standards are continuously monitored. Outcomes, such as the results of MAP assessments, are now reported on and shared at governing body meetings. Governors are fully aware that as yet they cannot readily measure the impact of either their own work or that of the college; however, they are clear that this is the direction in which they need to travel.

Governors are clear that their work must include a significant focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A process of link governors is being implemented. Although it is not yet clear exactly what this role will entail, those linked to curriculum areas are keen to have a much better understanding of the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Robust action has been taken to address the gender imbalance of the board.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Include SMART interim targets in the PIAP and associated plans so that progress towards the final end of year targets can be measured and plans adapted if necessary.
- Incorporate student performance objectives (including objectives relating to value added data) for teachers and managers at all levels so that they are held to account for the outcomes of their students.
- Develop governors' skills in understanding a range of student performance measures and their key roles and responsibilities through the training planned with an external consultant.

- Ensure that governors are provided with regular, up-to-date information and reports about student progress and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that they can effectively support and challenge senior leaders.



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