

Hartlepool Sixth Form College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the fifth reinspection monitoring visit following publication of the inspection report on 13 November 2014 which found the provider to be inadequate overall. Since the previous visit in July 2014 a number of new teachers have been appointed in several different subjects.

Themes

Improvement in outcomes for students on AS and A level courses

Significant progress

Improvements in attendance, retention and pass rates have all contributed to the much improved outcomes for students on AS and A level courses in 2015.

AS and A level examination results for 2015 are much better than in 2014. College data show a marked increase in overall success rates for AS levels and a smaller, but still notable, increase for A levels. Both figures are now above the most recently available national averages. There remains some variation between subjects and in a small number of subjects success rates, although improving, remain below average at AS-level. This is mainly associated with low pass rates rather than retention. The proportion of students achieving high grades has improved when compared with 2014 but remains below average for both AS and A levels.

GCSE English and mathematics results also improved well. All students who sat GCSE English gained a grade C or above and over one third achieved grades A* to B. Almost half of those entered for GCSE mathematics gained a grade C or above.

Students on vocational courses achieve well. Success rates in 2015 were high for most subjects, with high proportions of students achieving high grades.

At the time of the monitoring visit early in the academic year the destinations of many 2015 leavers were unknown. College staff are working to ensure that these are identified.

Improvement in teaching and learning

Reasonable progress

Broadly, as the improving attendance, retention and success rates show, the quality of teaching is improving. Mathematics teaching, in particular, has improved, as evidenced in results at AS, A level and GCSE. Physics has also improved well. The available evidence about the quality of teaching and learning across the college, including inspection observations, the college's own observation records and value added data continues to show variation in the quality of teaching in different subjects. External value added data, which have yet to be finalised, suggest that overall progress for students on AS and A level courses was in line with expectations, but with differences between subjects, especially at AS level. New teachers have

been appointed to a number of subject areas, particularly those where student progress has been slower, for example biology.

From this term academic support tutorials (ASTs) are better planned to link directly with subject lessons. These subject specific sessions are designed to provide extra tuition and support for students who are underachieving. During the inspection students were well targeted for attendance at subject ASTs. For example, where an early assessment in biology showed some students lacked certain skills they were directed to remain in class for the AST that followed a lesson and received appropriate tuition. The teacher checked their work individually to ensure that all are now competent.

Visits to lessons showed a number of strengths, including good engagement of students, good attitudes to learning, good behaviour, well planned and structured lessons, some effective group work, careful sequencing of activities building knowledge and understanding, and some effective use of questioning techniques. Where areas for improvement were observed these included late arrival to lessons, poor literacy skills, occasional examples of inappropriate behaviour, teachers' monitoring of individual progress not always thorough and astute, and spelling and grammar errors not corrected.

Evidence from the college's own observations is used to identify common strengths and areas for development which are then used in planning training to improve teaching skills. A full training day on outstanding practice in teaching took place in the summer and teachers are now using this to plan further improvements to their own skills. Consultants continue to work with individual teachers and groups of teachers where the college has identified there is a need for more focused ongoing development.

Improvement in assessment and progress tracking

Significant progress

The college monitoring of academic progress (MAP) system is well established. This enables students, teachers and managers to compare individual target grades with assessment grades at set times during the year. At the time of the inspection the first MAP assessment was about to take place. Where assessment shows students are not achieving as well as would be expected at this stage, they will be targeted for ASTs, or, exceptionally, counselled about alternative courses. The system has been subject to a number of refinements over the first year of implementation and further refinements are planned this year to improve its accuracy. A comparison of individual MAP grades from the end of the previous academic year and students' actual examination results in 2015 shows that in many subjects MAP assessments were broadly in line with actual results. In a very small minority of subjects teachers failed to identify students who subsequently failed, or who achieved well below their target grades.

College managers have further tightened the guidance for assessments used for MAP grades. For example, in some subjects more formal tests are included as well as coursework assessments. Newly appointed middle managers are carrying out standardisation exercises to ensure comparability between different teachers and classes for the same subject.

Managers are making increasing use of data about student performance including external value added data to inform their planning. Individual target setting for students is well established, although not all students have been given target grades at this early stage of the academic year.

Teachers who are new to the college have yet to be fully briefed about the MAP system or their own targets.

Improvement in advice and guidance

Significant progress

Managers have implemented more effective procedures to ensure that students are enrolled on courses that best meet their aspirations for future study and employment. All prospective students benefit from a guidance interview with a specialist advisor who has the expertise to explore these aspirations and recommend appropriate study programmes. Managers have made changes to the summer 'taster' programme so that activities reflect more closely the reality of studying specific courses at the college to help students assess whether it is the right choice for them. Students are now only enrolled by managers to ensure that all meet the entry requirements of their programme. New students are satisfied that the advice and support they received prior to joining the college has helped them to select appropriate study programmes.

The tutorial programme for level 2 learners and those level 3 learners in their second year who do not wish to progress to university focuses on career guidance and the development of skills for employment through the "Building My Skills" programme developed in conjunction with a large regional construction company. Managers have also developed a work experience programme for level 2 students that is carefully tailored to develop specific skills for each individual student. Skills development has begun, and work placements are planned to commence later this term.

Improvement in governance and quality assurance

Significant progress

Governors have developed a sound understanding of the college's key performance indicators. They have reviewed the results from 2015 examinations and clearly understand the areas in which the college has improved and those where further work remains. They have a clear understanding of the progress students make from their starting points, both in general and in individual subjects. They are fully aware of the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects within the regional economy and have a particular focus on performance in

them. Their increased level of knowledge and expertise has enabled them to provide senior leaders with a greater degree of challenge and support. Individual governors have undergone training that is helping them to take a more active part in meetings and ask more challenging questions.

Although they have yet to review the performance of specific groups of learners, such as those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, they are fully aware of their responsibilities in this area.

Managers and teachers have clear personal targets and progress against these targets is reviewed through a series of individual performance meetings during the year. Meetings to review final 2015 results have yet to take place but are planned shortly. Lesson observation is used well to help staff recognise and build on their strengths and address areas for improvement. Managers have identified a number of teachers who have not met expectations and have taken appropriate action to improve provision for students in these areas.

The self-assessment process has been refined for this year to include an assessment of personal development, behaviour and welfare as well as leadership and management, teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes. Governors are undertaking their own self-assessment of governance.

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