

Gateway Sixth Form College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to Gateway Sixth Form College following publication of the inspection report on 17 November 2016, which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, outcomes for learners and personal development, behaviour and welfare. Of the three provision types inspected, 16 to 19 study programmes were inadequate and traineeships and provision for learners with high needs required improvement.

Themes

The fitness for purpose of the post-inspection action plan, the quality of its monitoring and reporting arrangements and the rigour of senior leaders' and governors' scrutiny.

A comprehensive post-inspection action plan (PIAP), based on the eight improvement actions identified in the previous inspection report, has been developed and discussed with governors and senior managers. Detailed position papers, focused on each of the improvement actions, are being prepared to provide more clarity to actions taken and their impact. Quality monitoring meetings have been reintroduced to focus on specific actions and activities within the PIAP.

The PIAP is a large document that identifies 32 issues and circa 143 detailed actions and targets. Although there is a clear correspondence between the issues and the eight improvement actions, the vast majority of actions have a high priority. In its current form the PIAP is unlikely to lead to rapid improvements.

Priorities for improvement

- Produce a smaller, more focused PIAP which identifies key actions likely to lead to substantial and rapid improvements.
- Ensure that the senior leadership team share key actions immediately with programme area managers to enable them to work with their teams to bring about required changes and improvements.

Actions to strengthen governance and governors' knowledge of college performance and the impact of their holding managers to account.

Inspectors reported that governance was ineffective. Governors had failed to challenge and support senior leaders effectively during a period when standards had declined sharply. There were two principal reasons for this: the quality of information supplied was not good enough, and too few governors had experience of education and were therefore unable to contribute effectively.

Governors have arranged to visit a governing body of another sixth form college that has successfully negotiated the challenges posed by a poor inspection outcome. This is intended to allow governors to learn from their experiences.

Governors acknowledge an improvement in the information available to them, particularly through the introduction of a governors' data dashboard. Further work to ensure appropriate, aggregated and analysed data to help them understand the progress made by students is in progress. Governors and senior leaders have begun the search for two governors with education backgrounds who can improve the holding of staff to good account. The planned changes to the structure of committees will allow a clearer focus on the progress of students.

Priorities for improvement

- Recruit one or more governors with appropriate expertise in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that governors are provided with a clear analysis of the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and the progress of students so that they are able to support and challenge senior managers more effectively.
- Focus governors' meetings much more sharply on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and the progress made by students.

The effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment at meeting students' needs and challenging them to make good progress and achieve or exceed targets.

Inspectors found that 16- to 18-year-old students made inadequate progress. A number of issues contributed to this, including: low expectations from teachers, weak assessment within lessons, a lack of homework, insufficient feedback on marked work, a failure to use information about students' prior attainment and progress to plan lessons, and progress coaches working only with those at risk of dropping out and not those who were failing to achieve their potential. As a result, teachers often planned lessons aimed at the group as a whole and consequently the pace was too slow for some and the challenge too great for others.

Senior leaders have reduced the number of directors of study from three to two, giving these two post-holders a clearer focus on aspects of provision that caused concern during the inspection. One post has a focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the other has a focus on study programmes, including work-related learning and work experience. The purpose of these cross-college roles is to provide greater clarity and lead to improved outcomes for students.

Staff have attended a training event to consider carefully the expectations that they have of their students, including their target grades, attendance, punctuality and completion of homework. As a consequence, teachers have increased their focus on

approaches to assessment, individualised learning and the extent to which they challenge all students to achieve their potential. A handbook to make these expectations explicit will be available shortly.

To support these initiatives, the lesson observation process will focus on the key themes outlined above. In addition, teachers now formally report the progress of their students at five points during the year, to allow managers to intervene where this is insufficient. The work of progress coaches now includes support for learners who have fallen behind their academic targets rather than just those at risk of leaving the college altogether.

Managers are planning a staff training day in February 2017, in which assessment and feedback will be the dominant theme. The new professional development plan includes events to reinforce these themes throughout the year.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that teachers set and mark sufficient work to allow them to develop a good understanding of the progress their students are making. Undertake scrutiny of assessed work to ensure that the tasks are appropriate, and that feedback is helpful and contributes to increased student progress.
- Ensure that lesson observations focus on learning and progress and that teachers modify their approach to reflect the learning needs of all their students.
- Ensure that teachers frequently review student progress against target grades.
- Identify those subjects in which there is little impact of improvement actions and work closely with individual teachers to improve their practice.
- Monitor the work of progress coaches to ensure they set useful targets and review these frequently. Check the effectiveness of this work on the progress of students.

Actions taken to make better use of the good relationships with stakeholders to increase the number of students who participate in meaningful work-related learning.

One of the strengths referred to in the inspection report is the good relationships that exist between the college and a broad range of organisations and businesses including the local enterprise board. However, the college does not make good use of these relationships to increase the number of students who participate in work-related learning and meaningful work experience. Consequently, too few students, especially those on vocational programmes, participate in work experience or other work-related learning.

A review of the college provision has identified subject areas that need greater exploration to provide relevant and appropriate work experience. A recently developed three-year action plan recognises the need to set targets for each year in order to achieve improvements. For example, it is expected that the current number

of work placements will be doubled in 2017/18 in order that eventually all level 2 and level 3 students will undertake work experience during the course of their study programmes.

A work experience and employability strategy is to be coordinated across the college through the director of studies and the employer engagement coordinator. They will work with programme area managers, teachers and coaches to ensure consistent implementation of the strategy and that other initiatives, such as the introduction of short employability qualifications, speakers from industry and visits and the use of appropriate internal work placements, happen.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that the work experience and employability strategy leads to an increase in the number of students who participate in meaningful work-related learning and work experience, particularly for those on vocational programmes.

More rigorous analysis of student destination information to ensure the curriculum is appropriate and students are prepared well for further study and employment.

During the inspection, managers struggled to provide a clear analysis of the destinations of their former students. In many cases, there was no information available to indicate what had become of students once they left the college. As a result, managers were unable to state with any certainty whether the courses they followed were suitable or whether teaching, learning and assessment had prepared them well for their next steps in education or employment.

Managers have developed new systems for gathering the intended destinations of students to ensure that they are enrolled on appropriate study programmes and that their programme continues to match their career aspirations. This includes capturing information during pre-enrolment interviews, revisiting it during enrolment and reviewing it several times a year. They have considered the most appropriate ways to capture and analyse actual destinations of students but have not yet applied these systems.

Priorities for improvement

- Gather information on the destinations of those students who left the college in the summer of 2016. Analyse whether students progressed to destinations that matched their aspirations and course choices, and consider whether they were well prepared to make a successful transition to further study or employment.
- Monitor the implementation of new systems to ensure that students continue to follow programmes that are relevant to their intended destinations.
- Implement fully the new destinations monitoring processes.

Actions taken to improve students' attendance and punctuality through improved and consistent support arrangements.

Inspectors noted that students' attendance was too low and improvement actions had little impact. Many students arrived late to lessons and teachers failed to challenge them sufficiently. The attitudes associated with poor attendance did not prepare students well for employment.

The reintroduced quality monitoring sessions have focused on checking the accuracy and consistency of registration in order to provide the management dashboard with more robust data. As a result, more accurate attendance data is available to managers, providing them with a better understanding of current attendance.

The involvement of parents and carers, non-teaching staff and the appointment of additional progress coaches now encompasses a more holistic approach to the issue of poor attendance. Students have been made aware of the process for late arrival in a class. Senior leaders are also involved directly with at-risk students and meet with them to discuss a range of issues.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to improve attendance and punctuality by monitoring the impact of recent initiatives and adjusting approaches as necessary.
- Establish a culture of high attendance and punctuality from the outset and ensure that students are aware of these expectations.

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