

Gateway Sixth Form College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth form college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third re-inspection 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.

Reasonable progress

Version 6 (produced 26 June 2017) of the college-wide post-inspection action plan (PIAP) has a clear focus on the six main themes and priorities likely to lead to substantial and rapid improvement, as identified at previous re-inspection monitoring visits. Interim progress reports for February, May and June 2017 provide updates to monitor progress of the key actions in the PIAP.

Managers and staff use the PIAP effectively across the college. Consequently, governors have a clearer understanding of the key objectives, improvement actions and the progress made against the actions. Staff understand the key objectives and how they can contribute to progress and quality improvements.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers can capture students' attendance, expected grades, specific targets, reviews and work experience details on one system. Managers will use this key information to inform them of those students who are at risk of falling behind. Managers have set up a student review board which will consider the attendance, progress and behaviour of all students. The first meeting of this board will take place shortly.

The PIAP does not yet identify the impact of all key actions taken since the previous inspection clearly. For example, actions relating to timely and accessible data on student attendance and the monitoring of student attendance against targets do not clearly identify or quantify an impact. This is because the PIAP relies on September 2017 data and, at the time of the re-inspection monitoring visit, it is too early to have done a full evaluation. Similarly, classroom observations of all teachers are not

yet complete. Once evaluations are complete, the impact of key improvement actions will be used to inform judgements in the new self-assessment report.

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

Reasonable progress

Governors and senior leaders continue to prioritise the development of systems to enable more effective monitoring of students. For example, there is a new attendance system in place that allows daily reviews of individual attendance, classes, teachers and curriculum areas. This is to be used to identify those students at risk of falling behind in their studies. At the time of the visit, a new student progress measurement was not available for leaders or governors, because teachers were setting and marking their first assessment tasks.

Leaders recognise that the preliminary achievement rates for 2016/17 are disappointing, but that they do show slight improvements. The rates for approximately half the provision are above benchmark. Students on A2 and level 3 vocational qualifications have made better progress than in 2015/16 and high grades for GCSE English and mathematics have also increased.

Governors hold a monthly performance information group meeting, a subset of the standards committee that considers college performance in depth. Reports are very detailed but currently lack sufficient data to inform progress. Governors and senior leaders are aware of this and have nominated a governor to be the 'data tsar' to ensure that all reports contain relevant and timely data. Minutes of the performance improvement group and standards committee are too detailed and do not focus on improvement actions. Consequently, the impacts of the actions are vague.

It is not clear from minutes of board meetings how effectively governors challenge the senior leadership team. Key performance indicators, established by the new governing body, are now embedded into the college cycle. It is too soon to measure the impact that all indicators will have on the college's ability to make necessary improvements. However, early indications around attendance and progression are encouraging.

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

Reasonable progress

The observation of all teachers, following new guidelines, will be completed by the end of October 2017. It is too early to judge whether feedback and individual action plans following formal observations have an impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, early indications are positive. For example, there

is general agreement of the key strengths and weaknesses identified during joint observations by staff and inspectors.

The majority of level 3 students actively engage in lively learning sessions to which they responded with enthusiasm and commitment. For example, level 3 business studies students research topics presented to them at different locations in the classroom and are able to extend their research activities further if they complete tasks quickly and efficiently before presenting their findings to their peers and moving to the next task. More varied practice was observed in level 2 and level 1 lessons. Consequently, in a few sessions, students did not demonstrate the same levels of enthusiasm and commitment as most level 3 students did.

A new data system for teachers, in use since September, combines attendance recording and useful group profile information. This defines students' starting points. For example, teachers set initial target grades for all students based on their prior achievements. They will review these grades based on students' initial performance on each programme.

Most teachers plan lessons using documentation that is completed before the start of each session. While teachers identify how they will ensure that they focus on learning and the progress of all students, it is not clear how they will achieve this. For example, teachers acknowledge the need to differentiate within sessions to support students' individual progress, but do not explain clearly how this is to be achieved.

Scrutiny of a selection of students' files shows variable practice. Teachers generally mark GCE A level work well. They add useful 'what went well' (WWW) comments. They follow this up by 'even better if' (EBI) comments in order to encourage students to re-submit their work at an even higher level. Teachers of vocational subjects mark students' work thoroughly, especially their final assignments. However, too many teachers in vocational subject areas do not provide formative assessments for their students. Consequently, students do not develop a deep understanding in order to improve their attainment.

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.

Significant progress

Managers and staff continue to develop existing and new relationships with employers and employment agencies to provide students with relevant work experience. The September 2017 plan is now in place and staff update and monitor it centrally. All heads of department support the plan within the curriculum areas. Consequently, the vast majority of year one level 3 students will receive work experience. Almost all level 2 students will receive work experience. All year 2 level 3 year students who ask for work experience will be accommodated.

Tutors develop employability skills for all students through the new tutorial system. A number of tutorial sessions contain a focus on employability skills. Tutors plan these sessions to support the timings of the work experience visits. Risk assessment is now an area for development for staff due to the vast increase in work-experience placements since the previous inspection.

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

Reasonable progress

Managers' efforts to capture and analyse comprehensive destination data are improving. They have established a base line for 2015/16 and managers are about to analyse the destination data for 2016/17. The proportion of students progressing to a positive destination has improved. However, for those students whose destination is known, it is unclear how their college experience has added value to their future employment or training. For example, a relatively low proportion of students move into full-time employment or apprenticeships, and managers have not analysed the underlying reasons for this. Similarly, it is not clear which students have positive destinations relevant to the vocational programmes they studied.

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

Reasonable progress

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders and managers were unable to provide accurate data relating to attendance. There was some improvement in the attendance rate during 2016/17, but leaders recognise that it was difficult to make significant changes during the year.

Since the beginning of September, the principal meets and greets all students in the morning and there is an obvious senior leadership presence around the college to ensure prompt attendance. Consequently, there were very few examples of poor punctuality seen during the re-inspection monitoring visit.

All teachers are required to mark attendance registers within the first 15 minutes of starting. Student performance tutors contact promptly the students who fail to attend. After three non-attendances, staff invite parents or guardians to discuss a strategy to ensure that the student attends. This rigorous monitoring is having an early impact on attendance, which is substantially higher than that for the previous year. In a few subject areas attendance is slightly lower than the college target and managers are reviewing this.

Attendance at English and mathematics lessons has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers of English work very hard to support students who have English as a second language and this occasionally deflects them from the work that they are trying to do with the whole group. It is not always clear what the role of the learning support assistant is and how they are helping students to progress.

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