



# Brooke House Sixth Form College

## Re-inspection report

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## Introduction

Brooke House Sixth Form College was inspected in April 2005. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in business which was found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of the original inspection. If areas of learning or aspects of provision remain less than satisfactory following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The unsatisfactory curriculum area of business was re-inspected on 9 and 10 May 2007. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Business	4	3

## Context

The college offers GCE AS and A levels in business studies, accounting, law and economics. Vocational courses are offered from level 1 to level 3 and include: introductory and first diplomas in business, retail and administration; national awards in business studies; level 2 diploma in business administration and a national award which includes personal and business finance. These courses recruit mainly 16-18 students. There are currently 296 full-time students on business and administration courses.

### *Strengths*

- high success rates on most vocational courses
- good teaching on most vocational courses
- strong individual tutorial support

### *Areas for improvement*

- low success rates on all AS level courses and first diploma in business
- poor attendance and punctuality on many courses
- underdeveloped course review procedures

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Retention rates have improved and are at or above national averages on most programmes. Relatively few students have withdrawn from programmes to date in 2006/07. Success rates are high on the national diploma and certificate courses in business and on the introductory diploma in business, retail and administration. Success rates

remain below average on a number of courses, including AS level business, accounting and law and the first diploma in business. The college has taken positive steps to improve learners' attendance and punctuality. However attendance and punctuality are still poor on many courses.

## Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners are attentive when lessons are well prepared, taught with enthusiasm and include a range of activities. Some lessons, however, are uninspiring resulting in learner disaffection and poor motivation. Teachers and learners make good use of information and learning technology (ILT). Good use is made of case studies, local industry links, web based resources and visiting speakers to enrich learning. However, in some lessons, there were missed opportunities to relate theory to current business practice. On vocational courses work related skills are developed through effective links with industry. For example, the 'Academy of Finance' programme enables some students to link level 3 business programmes with paid internships in financial organisations.

Students are generally well supported by tutors, especially through individual tutorials and action planning. Feedback on assignment work is thorough and helpful to vocational students but there is a lack of co-ordinated formative assessment on AS and A level units which adversely affects students' performance.

## Leadership and management

The management of the curriculum area has been strengthened resulting in improved staff morale and productive teamwork. Clear systems for communication and the monitoring of learners' work are in place. Course review procedures are still underdeveloped and insufficiently self-evaluative. Lesson observation reports review teachers' performance thoroughly and lead to targeted action plans for improvement where appropriate. Managers recognise the need to improve some of the less challenging teaching, on the part of a minority of staff. More ambitious targets and robust action plans are now being set, with outcomes monitored.

## ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Brooke House Sixth Form College  
Date of visit: 9-10 May 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

### Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving college performance in 2006/07?

- In 2005/06 overall success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses increased by 4 percentage points, but remained below the average for similar colleges. The college has a very clear understanding of key areas of underperformance, and how these have contributed to the low overall success rate. Main areas of concern were success rates on AS-level courses and many courses in ICT, and the low and declining proportion of A\*-C grades in GCSE English and mathematics. The overall success rate for level 2 courses was above average, but below average on levels 1 and 3 programmes. Level 1 success rates, excluding Skills for Life courses, were broadly average. At level 3, GCE AS level success rates were low. Success rates were higher on GCE A level and vocational courses though still below national averages. Value added data indicated that most level 3 students made at least the progress expected and significantly better progress on a few courses.
- The college has undergone some significant changes during the last year, including a change of principal, some restructuring of curriculum areas and new appointments to the senior management team. The new principal has introduced a range of strategies designed to improve standards, and there is now a very clear focus in the college on the need to raise students' and teachers' expectations, improve attendance and punctuality and the quality of teaching and learning. Managers are working to develop an ethos of academic rigour and achievement, summed up in the new motto, "aspire, study, achieve".
- The college's in-year data indicates improvements in overall retention rates in 2006/07. Managers have introduced improved systems for tracking students' achievements and monitoring their progress. This has enabled staff to identify students at risk of underachieving more quickly and to provide more effective support to enable them to achieve. Teachers are using a new system to predict levels of students' achievements, which is monitored and revised each term, based on actual performance. The college believes that overall achievement rates will rise significantly this year, as a result of more effective monitoring and support and a much stronger focus on raising achievement at all levels. While it is too early to

determine the full impact of these improvement strategies, achievement rates in some modular tests are higher than at the same time last year.

Has there been any improvement in GCSE English A\*-C pass rates, and have the good higher pass rates in GCSE maths been maintained in 05/06?

- The proportion of A\*-C grades in GCSE English dropped further in 2005/06 and have declined over 3 years. Only one-third of students who started the course gained a grade C or better. In mathematics the proportion of students gaining a grade C or higher has dropped sharply since 2004/05 and was well below average. Managers have analysed reasons for the decline in success rates, and developed detailed action plans to improve performance. Greater consideration has been given to matching students to appropriate courses and a greater number are being encouraged to take literacy or numeracy programmes to help develop their skills, and enable them to progress to GCSE at a later date.

Has there been any improvement in achievement on level 1 and 2 vocational courses?

- In 2005/06 success rates improved on most level 1 and 2 vocational courses, though success rates on a few courses remained below national averages.

Performance data for 2005/06 shows significant variations in performance in different curriculum areas. What actions has the college taken to improve performance in the weak areas and what evidence is there of any impact?

- College managers are aware of some wide variations in performance of different curriculum areas, ranging from very good to inadequate. ICT has been identified as a major area for concern, and the college has already revised the curriculum offer and restructured the management in this department. There are some indications of improvement, for example, the pass rates for tests taken on the GNVQ foundation programme in January were higher than pass rates last year. Managers are aware that there is still much work to be done in this area and are continuing to monitor performance very closely.

What actions have been taken to address variations in performance of different groups of students?

- The college's analysis of performance data for 2005/06 demonstrated that some particular groups of students had success rates lower than the college average. These included students from black Caribbean heritage, who constitute over 20% of enrolments, as well as a smaller group of white students (13%) and Bangladeshi students (4%). As a very high proportion of students are from black and minority ethnic groups, the college does not have a separate strategy for improving the outcomes for these groups of learners. Some additional support is provided for students identified at risk of underachieving, for example, through several mentoring schemes, involving college staff, past students and undergraduate students from a local university. The analysis of differing levels of performance is

based on success rates and the college does not yet have sufficiently comprehensive value added data to examine how well these students achieve, relative to their prior attainment.

- Success rates for students with identified additional learning support needs were also lower than the college average. The college's own analysis demonstrated that one-third of those students identified with support needs did not take up the offer of support. Success rates for students who actually received support were in line with the college average. Managers are exploring further strategies to encourage a higher take-up of learning support, where specific needs are identified.

Have the strategies implemented to improve attendance and punctuality been maintained in 2006/07 and are attendance and punctuality improving further?

- Attendance rates improved by two percentage points in 2005/06 to 81%. In-year data for 2006/07 shows attendance rates of 79%. The college has strengthened its systems for monitoring attendance and punctuality and how absences and notified absences are recorded. Managers acknowledge that there is still much work to be done to ensure that procedures are implemented consistently across the college, and that improving attendance and punctuality remains a key issue for the college.

## Quality of education and training

What is the current key skills provision for level 1 and 2 students? How well do students achieve in key skills?

- Literacy and numeracy are integrated into all level 1 and 2 courses, and students develop skills in the context of their vocational specialism. Additional discrete sessions are also provided to develop literacy and numeracy skills further. Success rates on skills for life courses improved in 2005/06, but remained below average. Retention rates have improved further in 2006/07 and, on the basis of in-year test results, the college is predicting improved success rates. The college is extending its provision for level 3 students, offering key skills at different levels to meet students' needs.

How does the college ensure rigour and accuracy in its observations of teaching and learning?

- The college has increased the rigour of its internal lesson observation system through training observers, all of whom undertake paired observations to develop greater consistency in grading. Some moderation of grades takes place, but there is not yet a formal system to moderate a sample of observations across the college to ensure consistency of judgements and grades. In 2006/07 the college graded 50% of lessons observed as satisfactory and acknowledges the need to undertake further analysis to determine how to raise the proportion of good and better teaching across the college. Analysis of grades does not indicate significant variations in different subject areas, but the college has not yet undertaken analysis of grades

on different types or levels of courses. The college is developing more formal methods of sharing good practice through team meetings, staff development days and the use of external support on staff development activities. Recent staff development on assessment for learning was valued highly by teachers.

Are the revised arrangements for additional learning support effective in ensuring that all students receive appropriate support to meet their language and literacy needs?

- There are good arrangements to support students' language and literacy needs, for example, through both integrated and discrete ESOL provision, and integrated literacy sessions for level 1 and 2 courses. Students are screened at the start of the year, and improvements to enrolment processes ensured that fewer students joined courses after the start of term than in previous years. Those who did start late received the college induction to help them settle in quickly.

## Leadership and management

How consistently are college policies and procedures implemented and how effectively is performance now monitored across all curriculum areas?

- Senior managers monitor performance of each curriculum area through monthly meetings with curriculum managers. They review retention and attendance rates and progress towards targets, set at course level. Targets are negotiated between heads of department and senior managers to ensure they are both realistic and challenging. Managers have a clear understanding of any areas where performance is not meeting expectations and have demonstrated that they are prepared to make difficult decisions regarding curriculum and staffing if this is needed to improve provision for students. Lack of consistency in the implementation in cross college procedures has been an issue in the past, and although improving, remains an area for further improvement. Students perceived some significant variations in approach in different subjects or courses and from different teachers and personal tutors.

How effective are the induction and support for staff joining the college and for new teachers?

- The college has suffered from higher than average levels of staff sickness and turnover in recent years, and this has affected the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers are very aware of the need to create a more stable workforce to raise the quality of teaching and learning and thus improve student achievement. The proportion of staff leaving the college has reduced in 2006/07 and there are early signs that strategies implemented to improve working conditions for staff are beginning to have a positive impact. Teachers and curriculum managers say that they feel well supported, and that the improved management systems and procedures in the college are helping them to work more effectively.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:

- None

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

- College staff reported significant improvements brought about by the new principal and senior team. Curriculum managers commented that it felt like a new start and that they were excited and optimistic about the future. A strong focus on raising aspirations and achievements is shared by teachers and managers, with a realistic understanding of the work needed to achieve the college's strategic aims.