

Strode's College

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published June 2007	Provider reference 130833
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Introduction

Strode's 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 science and mathematics 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 inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate 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 less than satisfactory curriculum area of science and mathematics was re-inspected on 15 and 16 May 2007. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum/WBL area/CIF aspect	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Science and mathematics	Unsatisfactory (4)	Satisfactory (3)

Context

The college offers GCE AS and A level courses in further mathematics, mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and applied science. Science and mathematics are offered at GCSE level and a level 1 mathematics course is provided for students wishing to progress to GCSE mathematics in their second year. Approximately 333 students take advanced level courses and over 90 started GCSE and pre-GCSE mathematics. Almost all students are aged 16-18.

Strengths

- high retention on most courses
- good attendance
- good range of student activities used in lessons
- effective strategies to improve teaching and pass rates on most advanced courses

Areas for improvement

- very low pass rates at a high grade in GCSE mathematics
- very low pass rates at a high grade in GCSE science
- low achievement in GCE AS and A level Physics
- ineffective action taken to improve pass rates on GCSE courses

Achievements and standards

Achievement rates have improved significantly since the inspection in 2005 and are now satisfactory overall. Retention in many subjects has improved steadily over the last 3 years and in chemistry, mathematics and GCE AS biology they are now above national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates have also improved and, in most subjects, are similar to national averages. The pass rates in GCE AS and A level physics have remained consistently and significantly low. Although the proportion of students achieving a high grade pass in GCSE mathematics improved from 28% in 2004 and 2005 to 37% in 2006 this is still very low.

On GCE A level courses, the grades obtained by students are broadly similar to those expected, given students' prior qualifications. Punctuality and attendance are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection with the introduction of more student involvement in lessons. Teachers make good use of data projectors and interactive whiteboards to show clear notes, diagrams, graphs and computer based interactive simulations. Students also use these to present their work to others in the class. Lessons are planned to include quick and effective consolidation or revision activities to involve students early in the lesson. Whilst there is some excellent practice, in some lessons seen in this re-inspection, questioning to students was not sufficiently targeted to ensure that all were involved.

Student support is effective and staff act quickly in response to poor attendance or performance. Students are aware of the target grades they are set and receive good additional support.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory. Managers have been effective in introducing new teaching strategies and improving achievements on many courses. The self-assessment report is accurate in its overall judgements but the lesson observation scheme does not focus sufficiently on weaknesses in level 2 provision. Action to improve GCSE pass rates following the inspection have not yet had sufficient impact on students' achievements.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Strode's College
Date of visit: 15 and 16 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

To what extent have strategies to address underperformance been successful?

- Actions taken to address those courses that significantly underperformed in 2004/05 were, in the main, successful. The annual development plan from the 2005 self-assessment report identified the need to raise achievement rates in ICT, politics, maths and science. Success rates did improve in ICT and politics and in most science and maths courses.
- Overall, achievements and standards continued to improve in 2005/06. The majority of students are 16 – 18 years old and are studying at level 3. These students achieved broadly in line with national averages. At levels 1 and 2 there were improvements for both 16-18 year olds and adult learners, but success rates for level 2 vocational courses were low. The college has subsequently revised the level 2 programmes it offers, with a designated teaching team and increased additional learning support. The proportion of high passes for GCSE English, Maths and Science in 2005/06 was low.
- The data available suggest that most students on level 3 courses make good progress when taking into account their GCSE grades. In 2005/06 students made particularly good progress, for example, on the following courses: AS computing, A2 design, AS English language/literature and AS/A2 law. However, there remain pockets of provision where, in the same year, students made less progress than expected. These courses include AS photography, AS English literature, A2 English language/literature and AS/A2 business studies.

The college's target is for all courses to be at, or above, national average for sixth form colleges by September 2007.

Quality of provision

How effective has the peer observation system been in sharing good practice and developing the skills of all teachers?

- The peer observation system, whereby teachers observe a colleague's lesson once a year, has encouraged staff to reflect on their own teaching. A discussion with teachers and a review of the paperwork suggests that it is proving to be helpful in sharing good practice and promoting debate about teaching and learning. It operates alongside other approaches to developing teachers' skills, such as the assessed learning observation system and staff training events. Second-year students interviewed confirm that teachers are using ICT more frequently and effectively, including interactive whiteboards and the college's virtual learning environment, and that lessons usually involve a wide range of activities to help to keep them motivated. Students on level 1 and level 2 courses report that their lessons are usually interesting, varied and challenging. For most peer observations, teachers choose the colleague they wish to observe. In some cases, teachers are steered towards a specific observation by their line manager.

What impact has the review of individual learning plans (ILPs) had on students?

- Since September, the college has been using an on-line ILP system to track and monitor students' progress. Managers and teachers are enthusiastic about the system. It is easily accessible by students, personal tutors, teachers and managers. The system is useful in providing a structure to record one-to-one meetings and to review progress and set targets. The on-line form identifies up-to-date information on students' attendance and late arrivals to lessons, as well as a target grade for each of the students' courses (usually their ALIS minimum grade plus one). The system has been adapted to incorporate information about additional learning support. Students interviewed find it easy to use and acknowledge that it provides them with a focus on what they need to do and by when. While the form is valuable in drawing together in one place relevant information, it is the one-to-one meetings that students most value.

Students' attendance has improved this year. A number of factors, including attendance information available on the ILP, have contributed to this. Staff and second-year students report that closer monitoring and letters sent to their home this year have had an impact on students' attendance.

Leadership and management

How has the lesson observation process, along with visits to other colleges, impacted on current and future staff development programmes?

- Teachers are observed formally once a year as part of the assessed learning observation (ALO). Informal observations also take place, as well as peer observations, as discussed above. General feedback from the ALO informs staff development activities. Since the last inspection, much energy has gone into improving teaching and learning across the college. Staff training days have focused on generic teaching and learning issues and there is a clear drive to encourage teachers to adopt more lively and interesting ways of teaching and to use ICT more effectively. To reflect the high proportion of full-time students on level 3 courses, most observations have been of lessons at this level. Teachers who have visited other colleges to observe lessons have found this to be very productive and have shared their findings informally with colleagues.

The last AAV letter noted that an analysis of the achievements of different groups of students in the college, including by ethnicity, had recently been completed. How has this analysis been used?

- The college produced a report in November 2006 on student performance by gender, ethnicity and disability. The report does not identify any key trends in relation to ethnicity. It does, though, identify relative underperformance by males. As a result, staff attended a one-hour session on gender and learning during a staff training day in February 2007. It is not yet possible to identify the impact of this.