

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Paston College

Date of visit: 5 October 2007

Context

Paston College is a small sixth form college located in North Walsham. It serves a catchment area of approximately 400 square miles of coastal, rural and broadland Norfolk, which has little industry and a dispersed population. Many students have long daily journeys to college and public transport is poor. The nearest alternative FE provision is seventeen miles away in Norwich. The proportion of people who progress to higher education is significantly below the national average in the area that the college serves. The proportion of students who leave school with five or more GCSE grades A*-C including mathematics and English in Norfolk is below the national average.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates, particularly on long courses at level 1 and level 2?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

College data for 2007 indicate that success rates for students aged 16-18 have continued to improve at all course levels and are now at the national average. The number of high grades achieved at A level shows a particularly strong improvement. Value-added information demonstrates that students aged 16-18 are making much better progress than predicted, given their starting points. However, the overall data mask some significant differences at course level, for example the variability in success rates in different GCSE subjects and first diplomas and the weaker performance in science subjects at AS and A level compared with other subjects. Low success rates in science subjects at AS level resulted in the college failing to meet its target for AS level success in 2007. The college is taking appropriate steps to remedy the problem. The arrangements for the leadership and management of the sciences have been changed, but too recently to yet demonstrate any improvement in standards.

Success rates for students aged 19 years and over have also shown significant improvement at level 1 and level 3 and success rates are now well above the national average. There have been wide fluctuations in the level 2 success rate but it is currently below the national average.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made with the college's lesson observation procedures?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college's lesson observation procedures have been thoroughly revised since the last inspection and now provide a valuable source of information on the quality of teaching and learning. Observations have enabled the college to accurately identify aspects of teaching and learning which require improvement and thus provide appropriate and sharply focused staff training. However, the evaluation of lesson observations has not placed sufficient emphasis on trends in performance. For example the observations indicate a significant difference in the quality of teaching and learning between AS and A level subjects. This was subsequently confirmed by the difference in the 2007 success rates but the college did not identify or address the issue.

What progress has the college made in the promotion and take-up of enrichment activities?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

The college has developed and extended its range of enrichment activities to provide some interesting and unusual options, such as creative writing and the psychology film society. Sporting and creative options are the most popular and students say how much they enjoy them. The enrichment activities are well publicised and participation rates have improved so that now some 50% of students follow an option.

Leadership and management

How has the college's response to equal opportunities issues improved?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

The college has made an excellent response. It is compliant with all current legislation and monitors the service it provides for different groups of students extremely effectively, through student perception surveys and performance analysis. This enables the college to state with real confidence that students with physical difficulties are treated fairly and achieve well. Differences in the performance of students according to their gender are analysed at college and course level and indicate that the college is making progress in improving the success rates of male students. The college has taken effective action to raise the profile of equal opportunities in the curriculum. Schemes of work for all subjects demonstrate where equal opportunities issues may be developed and extended, and this is reflected in lesson planning. All staff have received training in equal opportunities.

What progress has been made with the improvement of social and recreational accommodation?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

The college's accommodation does not lend itself easily to providing social and recreational accommodation for students and an experiment to provide social space on one site was unsuccessful. The college has plans to provide a mobile classroom which will provide some additional space and there are ambitious plans to relocate the college to new purpose-built accommodation in 2011. However the current situation has not changed significantly from that recorded at the last inspection.