

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Bexhill College

Date of visit: 6 March 2008

Context

Bexhill College is a medium-sized sixth form college in East Sussex. It serves a mixed area, with pockets of affluence combined with relative deprivation in parts of Bexhill and the Hastings area. Most learners are full-time students aged 16 to 18 on advanced level courses, although the college has diversified significantly in recent years to offer a fairly wide portfolio of courses for students of all ages at all levels. The college contract for work-based learning has recently been terminated. The college was last inspected in March 2007. At that inspection, overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management were all judged to be satisfactory, as was the college's capacity to improve. Provision in four sector subject areas was inspected, and each of these was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving students' outcomes?	Insufficient progress
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Most students at the college are aged 16-18 and take courses at advanced level. Success rates at this level have not improved since the last inspection; they declined by one percentage point in 2006/07, and were significantly below the national average for 2005/06. In particular, success rates at AS level declined sharply, due to a fall in overall pass rates from 88% to 81%. Retention rates continued to improve slightly, but in several AS subjects success rates are low. On other qualification types at level 3, success rates are satisfactory or better; on BTEC courses they have improved, and at A2 level they have risen to be in line with the national average. The progress that students make in comparison to their previous attainment is broadly satisfactory, although it remains the case that there are significant variations between subjects.

Success rates on level 2 courses for students aged 16-18 rose significantly in 2006/07, but they remain below the national average. Long-standing weaknesses in GCSE mathematics, and to a lesser extent English, persist: too few students achieve a grade C or better on these courses.

At level 1, there was a significant improvement in success rates for the relatively small number of students aged 16-18, and these are now good. Success rates for adult students in 2006/07 were good on level 1 courses, satisfactory at level 2, and below the national average at level 3.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing quality assurance procedures that lead to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to place an increasing emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, which was identified as a key area for improvement at the last inspection. Arrangements for judging the quality of lessons are increasingly rigorous. At the time of the visit, college evidence showed a slight improvement in the quality of lessons since last year; equally importantly, evidence shows that judgements about lessons are increasingly realistic with, for example, a small number of inadequate lessons being identified. Detailed quality reviews conducted in each curriculum area examine a good range of evidence. The findings from quality reviews are robust in most respects, although some of the judgements made on the quality of teaching are not easily reconcilable with students' performance in the subjects concerned.

Since the 2007 inspection, the college has invested significantly in staff training, particularly to improve the extent to which teaching meets individual students' needs, and to promote more varied learning strategies. The college's evidence from lesson observations shows that the reflection generated by the training has begun to have an impact in some areas, with teachers trying out new techniques. Managers continue to find it difficult to persuade a minority of teachers to adapt their teaching techniques to better meet the needs of students that now come to the college.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the consistency and quality of middle management?	Insufficient progress
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Since the last inspection, the college has re-structured some aspects of middle management in order to improve its consistency and quality. It is too early to judge the impact of these changes. Under the current arrangements, two directors of teaching and learning have responsibility for eight heads of section, who are supported by deputies. Beneath this structure there are course managers, responsible for day-to-day course management. Distinctions between strategic, operational and administrative functions are not always apparent. Responsibilities for quality assurance are divided between the curriculum teams and a separate, but linked, quality management function. Senior leaders accept that further work needs

to be done to ensure that lines of accountability for quality assurance are transparent. Although progress has been made, there remains much to be done before all curriculum managers at all levels have a common and explicit understanding of their accountabilities in respect of students' outcomes and the quality of provision.

What progress has been made in improving the analysis and use of data by staff at all levels to drive improvement?	Insufficient progress
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College leaders are fully aware that the analysis and use of data to secure improvement are underdeveloped. Some progress has been made. The range of data available for managers and teachers to use is improving. Data are now used to monitor students' progress more carefully, and data on different student cohorts can be analysed in depth to uncover patterns of performance. Areas of under-performance are accurately identified. However, too much analysis remains retrospective. Managers still do not make the best use of the available data to assess performance and progress in a timely manner. Interpretation of data lacks sophistication and clarity, and data are not used fully effectively to tease out the links between students' progress and the quality of provision, including the quality of teaching and learning. The college does not have a key member of staff who has a comprehensive understanding of the range of educational data available and the uses to which it can be put to sharpen accountability and drive improvement.

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of self-assessment to secure improvement?	Insufficient progress
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The overall college self-assessment report (SAR) is broadly accurate in its judgements about the quality of provision, but is not yet sufficiently effective to secure improvement. Key strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified. Development plans arising from self-assessment are well considered, although targets for improvement are on occasion insufficiently precise or insufficiently challenging. The content of the SAR lacks clarity in some respects. For example, the commentary on achievement and standards does not give a clear and succinct picture of the key strengths and areas for attention in respect of students' outcomes. College performance is compared to national averages that are out of date, with the result that a slightly over-optimistic picture is portrayed.

Self-assessment reports for curriculum areas contain an overall grade, and individual grades for each subject area within the section. These grades are usually supported by the evidence. Individual key questions within each SAR are not graded; as a consequence, it is not possible to determine whether judgements made, for example, on teaching and learning and on students' outcomes, are reconcilable. The data presented on students' performance in the SARs are limited. For example, trends

over time are not always presented, and success rates for different qualifications are not always apparent. As at the last inspection, commentary on the quality of teaching and learning is insufficiently evaluative.