MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Longley Park Sixth Form College

Date of visit: 27 November 2007

Context

The college opened in September 2004 as a new-build provision based on the site of a former secondary school. It has been established primarily to serve the community of north-east Sheffield; an area with significant educational, social and economic challenges. The college has seven partner schools and most of its students come from the local area. There are over 1,000 full-time students at the college; the vast majority aged 16 to 18. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is representative of the local area, although higher than the national average, and there are more female than male students. The majority of students are enrolled on programmes at level 3, although there is also significant provision at levels 1 and 2. A new principal has been in post since September 2007.

Achievement and standards

How successful have actions been to improve performance in under-performing areas?	Reasonable progress

A number of strategies have been put in place, both college-wide and in specific areas. These include changes to the curriculum to replace under-performing courses with those more suitable to meeting students' needs, for example in accounting. Advice and guidance have also been refined to help students pick the most appropriate programme.

Major developments have taken place in support across the college, such as enhanced tutor groups, the learning conversation and more targeted support programmes. Support for individuals is tracked so its impact can be assessed and the programme adjusted accordingly. All developments are very closely monitored to evaluate their use and support early intervention for student issues. Although many initiatives have only been in place since September 2007 early indications are positive.

How successful has the strengthening of systems been in improving attendance?	Reasonable progress

The strengthening of systems has already been shown to have a positive impact. Attendance figures for this year are higher than comparable figures for last year. The monitoring of attendance is given a high priority within the college. There are weekly printouts covering attendance which are reviewed in tutorial and information can be accessed online at all times. Regular meetings between progression tutors and managers are enabling the college to use a coding system for students to show good attendance and strong performance. Causes for concern are also highlighted and graded according to severity. This allows appropriate support to be put in place and monitored.

Quality of provision

How successful has the pilot scheme (providing a personalised support package) been in supporting students, especially those with weak GCSE profiles?	Reasonable progress

Developments in the area of support are seen as an important part of the college's strategy for improvement. A number of initiatives are linked together under the banner of 'supporting learning better'. One of the key parts of this has been the introduction of enhanced tutor groups for those who are at risk of not succeeding and would be thought to benefit most.

These groups are smaller than most other tutor groups. Students in them receive additional support in literacy and numeracy, where appropriate, which also helps to develop their study skills. Other aspects of support, such as the academic tutorials are also strongly promoted to students in these groups. Early indications from this initiative are positive but it is too early to see its full impact.

Has the college continued to carry out initial assessment early in the academic year? Has support been put in place for those that need it, on courses at all levels?	Reasonable progress

The college has a prioritised approach to support, which was introduced in 2006/07 and refined for 2007/08. Initial assessment is carried out pre-enrolment where possible and then during the interview process and induction. In addition, during the year, staff can refer students and students can self refer if they think they will benefit from support. Support has been put in place on courses at all levels where there is an identified need. Support arrangements are as flexible as possible. There are regular reviews so resources can be moved to different areas as individual and group support needs change. Additional learning support links into college wide developments, such as 'the learning conversation', to ensure a coherent approach. The college is currently working on the evaluation of the benefit of support at different levels to assist in future planning.

What progress has been made in integrating key skills into students' main programme?	Reasonable progress

College policy has changed in relation to key skills and the only key skills that is now mandatory for students is IT at level 2, for those who do not have an IT qualification. Although this is taught in discrete sessions, evidence for the portfolio is taken from students' main programme wherever possible. In addition, key skills support students in their main programme, for example, in the presentation of course work. Where discrete assignments are used they are flexible so that students can choose a topic that they find interesting and which links with their area of study; for example, an English student researching one of their favourite authors. Success rates for key skills IT at level 2 have been improving and are now comparable with national rates.

Leadership and management

How well are target setting skills being developed, particularly in relation to the performance management process and addressing the issues from observations?	Reasonable progress

Staff have received training in target setting and in the use of data in informing the target setting process. A great deal of data are readily accessible and there are informative handouts on its use. Targets for courses and students are set in a dialogue between teachers and managers, and

teachers and students. Monitoring of them is covered in regular meetings and anomalies can now be spotted and addressed.

In relation to the performance management process and addressing the issues from observations, the process has been tightened up. Training for managers has already taken place and is being rolled out to staff this term. Appropriate targets and associated actions can be followed through the whole process to successful outcomes, with their associated support strategies, for example the use of learning coaches.