

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Thomas Rotherham

Date of visit: 27 November 2007

Context

Thomas Rotherham is a sixth form college located one mile from Rotherham town centre. The college was last inspected in 2004. The college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory, as were leadership and management and social inclusion. Guidance and support for learners were judged to be good, as was the quality of teaching and learning. Two of the sector subject areas inspected were judged to be satisfactory, and three were judged to be good. A new principal was appointed in September 2006. The core business of the college is the provision of full-time general education courses for 1,430 students aged 16-18, 93% of whom are on level 3 programmes. The college provides part-time programmes for 713 adult learners in modern and foreign languages, information technology (IT), early years, literacy, numeracy, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving under-performing courses?	Reasonable progress
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Aspects of students' performance, including low pass rates on some courses, and the low achievement of high grades, were identified as areas for improvement at the last inspection. Within the 2006 self assessment report the performance of chemistry, performing arts/music, computing and art was judged to be unsatisfactory. Following internal audits on chemistry and performing arts/music, significant improvements have been made in chemistry with the proportion of high grades at GCE A-level level increasing from 32% to 44%. Performing arts/music has not made the same progress and learner performance has remained below expectations. Success rates are improving, but they remain below the national average. Computing and art show improving trends, with success rates in computing at A-level improving

slightly, but remaining below national averages. Art shows an excellent success rate at A-level.

The college has accurately identified two 'at risk' areas in its 2006/07 self assessment report, in health and social care and media, while performing arts remains in this category. A development strategy has been put in place to improve assessment practice and outcomes in health and social care. In media the teaching space has been improved and technical support increased.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring the college is responsive to learner views and how have these impacted on college activities?	Insufficient progress
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A student involvement strategy has recently been developed by the college. The strategy sets the learner at the heart of all aspects of practice across the college including greater involvement on the corporation, involvement in teaching and learning and assessment, learner mentoring and learner involvement in appointing staff. While it is too early to determine the impact of the strategy in increasing learner involvement, learners have recently been involved in appointing a head of careers. Historically learner views have been captured and analysed through surveys and focus groups, however these are held too late in the year to provide effective feedback to learners on any resulting changes. An active learner council provides an effective focus for learner involvement in open evenings and other college activities, but learners are not yet sufficiently engaged with the corporation.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring the college continues to be responsive to the needs of local employers?	Significant progress
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Comprehensive arrangements for work placements were identified as strength at the last inspection. This strength has been maintained and is accurately identified as a strength within the self assessment report. All full-time learners have the opportunity for work placements and 488 have undertaken work placements in 2007. In addition, the adult and community learning provision of the college has effectively re-positioned itself and is now

delivering a Train to Gain contract in IT, early years and skills for life. The college is working directly with 30 employers on this contract. In addition the college is a lead partner in a jointly funded ESF/LSC project which is targeting both individuals and small business in the creative industries sector. The college is part of a consortium delivering accredited training in business skills and personal effectiveness to 1,500 employers. The college has recently developed some employer feedback measures to help them identify the impact of this initiative for local employers.

What progress has been made in ensuring that self-assessment is rigorous and accurately reflects the views of learners, employers and staff (particularly addressing the concerns from the staff survey)?	Significant progress
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Insufficiently robust quality assurance and self-assessment processes were identified as an area for development at the last inspection. Significant progress has been made in ensuring that self-assessment is both rigorous and inclusive. The process starts in a timely way and is well developed at course level. Feedback from learners, and where appropriate employers, is captured as part of the process. A rigorous moderation exercise is undertaken with senior staff, and this will include peer assessment in the future. The report accurately identifies those areas which are under performing and effective links are made to the development plan to bring about improvements. The most recent staff survey indicates that staff are now feeling more able to contribute and say what they think.