

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Blackpool Sixth Form College

Date of visit: 20 September 2007

Context

Blackpool Sixth Form College serves an area within a radius of some 20 miles of the Fylde coast. Almost all of the 1,610 full-time students are aged 16 to 18, around half live in Blackpool and most study a level 3 programme. Blackpool contains areas of significant deprivation, with 40% of the population living in some of the most deprived areas in England. The Blackpool district contains a very low proportion of minority ethnic residents. Post-16 participation is an issue in the Blackpool area.

Blackpool Sixth Form College was last inspected in April 2005. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. In curriculum areas, the college was awarded five grades; four were satisfactory with good in mathematics and science. A contributory grade outstanding was given to geography and electronics and a contributory grade good was given to music. Guidance and support were judged to be good, and educational and social inclusion were judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving the success rates for full time students on level 3 courses?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates on level 3 courses improved by 4% in 2007 to just below the national average. The success rate on AS courses increased by 6%, significantly reducing the gap between the college rate and the national average. The A level success rate remained static at 90%. The success rate on BTEC national courses is high.

What improvement has the college made in the pass rates of underperforming courses, particularly in AS and GCSE subjects?	Reasonable progress
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The AS pass rate, including general studies improved from 81% in 2006 to 84% in 2007. The AS pass rate excluding general studies was 87% in 2007 and is broadly in line with the national average.

The college's policy of all students being entered for general studies has been changed for 2007/08. The achievements of students in psychology, biology, computing and modern foreign languages improved significantly in 2007.

The proportion of students achieving a high grade A*-C pass in a GCSE increased from 40% in 2005 to 64% in 2007. The high pass rates in GCSE English and mathematics have been maintained in 2007. The proportion of students progressing from a level 2 course to a level 3 course has increased from 14% in 2005 to 50% in 2007. The proportion of students achieving a high grade in applied GCSE art and design and health and social care and the certificate in digital applications has improved but remains below the national average.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in using data on students' prior attainment in the embedding of target setting to improve students' performance?	Reasonable progress
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The use of minimum target grades has been embedded into the tutorial system and students interviewed on the visit were very clear about their target grades and how they were used to monitor their performance in each subject. The college's policy of students redoing work not reaching their minimum target grade is not consistently applied across all subjects.

The college's overall value added score improved for both AS and A levels. At AS level the college is now in the top 25% of all colleges and at A level it is in the top 40%. Managers are closely monitoring those subjects that have underperformed. The value added grades in modern foreign languages and psychology improved significantly in 2007.

What progress has been made in developing the college's vocational curriculum?	Significant progress
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The college has further increased its vocational curriculum offer in 2007 with the introduction of BTEC courses in medical science, performing arts, media production and IT practitioner. The number of first year level 3 vocational students has more than doubled to 230 for 2007/08.

Pass rates on the national certificates and national awards were all 100% in 2007 and the proportion of students achieving high grades on the national certificates was high.

What progress has been made with the new lesson observation system to improve the quality of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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A new lesson observation policy was introduced in 2006 and all staff are observed twice a year. All heads of department have received training in completing observations and giving feedback. Anyone receiving a grade 3 or 4 is re-observed following support and training. Lesson observation records indicate that teachers receive detailed feedback, good practice is identified for sharing across the college and training needs are clearly identified. The college places a strong emphasis on using student feedback to influence developments. The college's building programme is well under way and this is improving the learning environment and cramped classrooms in some subjects.

A new director for teaching, learning and assessment was appointed July 2007. An impressive plan is in place to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. A revised teaching and learning group, to support sharing good practice across college, has been established with representatives from each department. All teachers have been allocated a buddy who is a teacher from another department. Plans are in place to carry out peer observations by December 2007 and to share good practice. A whole college training day was held in August 2007 and all staff are expected to experiment with the ideas presented and discuss these with their teaching buddy and in course team meetings.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made with the college's "special measures" approach in dealing with underperforming courses?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to strengthen its quality assurance procedures and systems. A range of successful initiatives have been implemented across the college to further raise standards. These include revised enrolment procedures, a more appropriate curriculum offer, additional revision sessions, very close monitoring of attendance, regular assessments and better use of data to monitor student performance. Teachers are more accountable for their results. A refined quality assurance system involves heads of department meeting with senior managers every term to discuss key performance indicators. A number of staffing issues have been dealt with effectively.

Subjects placed in "special measures" in September 2006 were closely monitored and supported by senior managers. Managers and teachers of these subjects appreciated this support. The results in AS and A level psychology, modern foreign languages and biology and applied ICT improved significantly in 2007. The pass rates in AS human biology and ICT did not improve. The college has introduced a BTEC national certificate in medical science and no longer offers the human biology course. ICT and biology courses remain in special measures in 2007.