

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Strode's College

Date of visit: 3 June 2008

Context

Strode's College is a sixth form college primarily serving the needs of full-time 16-19 year old students in the areas of Egham, Chertsey, Addlestone and the borough of Spelthorne, although it increasingly attracts students from further afield. The college has 1,130 full-time students, most of whom are studying advanced level courses. A significant number of adult learners also attend the college, most of who are studying at level 1.

The college was last inspected in May 2005. At this time most aspects of the college were judged to be satisfactory, although provision in science and mathematics was judged to be unsatisfactory. This curriculum area was re-inspected in 2007 and found to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving students' outcomes?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in improving students' outcomes for both age groups at all levels. Overall the success rates for long courses have risen faster than the national average, and as a result have moved from a low base in 2003/04 to be broadly in line with the national average for sixth form colleges in 2005/06. College data for 2006/07 shows that improvement has continued. For students aged 16-18 on advanced level courses, success rates in 2006/07 were slightly above the 2005/06 national average, and are likely to be in line with the 2006/07 national average. At level 2, the rate of improvement for students aged 16-18 has been even faster, with long course success rates rising from 68% in 2004/05 to 85% in 2006/07, significantly above the national average. The small number of students taking courses at level 1 achieve well. Adult learners do well at all levels. The college's use of data on students' performance in self-assessment is sound, although it does not present a clear overview of the outcomes for students significantly enough, in discrete sector subject areas, to highlight trends over time.

The college subscribes to the Advanced Level Information System (ALIS) in order to assess the progress that students make in comparison to their starting point. The

ALIS report for 2006/07 confirms the very good progress that the college has made over the last five years in improving students' performance on advanced level courses. The overall value-added score has improved from significantly negative to positive, with a rising trend in each of the last five years.

Despite these improvements, college managers recognise that success rates or value added performance remains weak on a significant minority of courses.

What progress has the college made in securing improvements in under-performing courses, particularly in science and mathematics?	Reasonable progress
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The college's self-assessment report recognises that students' outcomes on several key courses are no better than satisfactory. These include mathematics at AS and GCSE level, GCSE science, and A/AS levels in human biology, psychology, media studies and business studies. Reasonable progress is being made in addressing these weaknesses. The college's lesson observation scheme is being used well to target weaknesses in teaching and learning where these are identified as the main cause of under-achievement, and teachers are receiving good support to help them to improve. Well-focused action plans are drawn up, and these are carefully monitored. Good use is made of students' views to help to identify weaknesses in the quality of provision. Data is being used well to monitor progress, and in the faculty of science and mathematics strong leadership is contributing to improvement in several areas. Increasingly, the college is characterised by a culture in which teachers and managers have direct accountability for their students' results. Although in some cases, difficult staffing issues have not been easy to resolve, and improvement has been slower.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity throughout its work?	Reasonable progress
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In the self-assessment report, the college has identified "more active promotion of equality and diversity" as a key area for improvement. The college has a diverse intake, and relations between students from different backgrounds are harmonious. The college fulfils its statutory obligations in regards to equality of opportunity. Leaders recognise that they could do more to actively promote and celebrate the diversity of the student body and they are making reasonable progress in achieving this. An increasing number of cross-college events, sometimes instigated by students, are designed to encourage students and staff to learn more about the diversity of cultures in the college. Staff have received training on issues around disability, homophobia, and differential achievement by gender. Although college managers believe that equality and diversity are effectively promoted through the

taught curriculum, the evidence for this is less secure. The lesson observation process is designed to capture information on equality and diversity, but a detailed analysis is not carried out to judge the extent to which lessons, learning resources and other aspects of classroom practice are used to promote equality and diversity. Most faculty self-assessment reports do not comment on this aspect of leadership and management, although such reporting is to be compulsory in the next cycle of self-assessment. Efforts to ensure that college staff and managers reflect the diversity of the student population have met with limited success.

What progress has the college made in developing its 14-19 provision in partnership with others?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress in developing partnership working in order to meet policy objectives on the 14-19 phase, including specialist diplomas. The college operates in a complex environment, attracting students from a particularly large number of schools dispersed over a wide area. The college is a key partner in two 14-19 consortia, based in Runnymede and Spelthorne, which have had some success in applying to run specialised 14-19 diplomas. The college is particularly involved in the creative and media diploma, and will be delivering one of the level 2 units for the Spelthorne consortium in the next academic year, with the same subject offered via the Runnymede consortium from 2009. The diploma in business, administration and finance will also be offered from 2009, with further lines of learning being introduced in subsequent years. The college has particularly strong links with six schools, and is involved in an increasingly wide range of initiatives with these schools aimed at raising participation and improving choice for young people through coherent curriculum mapping. Partnership working with the nearest general further education college has also improved. Although all of these developments are promising, it is too early to assess the full impact of the college's partnership work on the participation and achievement of young people in the area.