

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Brooke House Sixth Form

Date of visit: 22 April 2008

Context

Brooke House Sixth Form College (BSix) was established in 2002 in Hackney, east London. Hackney has a population of almost 200,000, is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs and the fifth most deprived borough in the country. The College aims to recruit around 1,400 students every year, approximately 14% are 19 year olds, 5% are 14-16 year olds who are taught on existing courses and the rest are 16-18 year olds on full-time courses. The student group is ethnically diverse with 25% African and 20%-25% African-Caribbean.

The college offers courses at all levels from entry through to advanced, including 30 A Levels and a wide spread of vocational areas. A quarter of students are on BTEC National Diploma courses, a quarter are on A Levels and the rest are equally divided between Levels 1, 2 and Entry. The students' GCSE points scores on entry are either the lowest or second lowest nationally.

The college was inspected in April 2005 and inspectors judged the provision to be: good in science, mathematics and humanities; satisfactory in English, visual and performing arts and media, literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), with ESOL being attributed a contributory grade of good. The quality of teaching and learning, and leadership and management, were judged to be satisfactory and support for students, and social and educational inclusion, was good. Business administration was judged to be unsatisfactory; this was re-inspected in May 2007 and judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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| What progress has the college made to improve students' achievements? | Reasonable progress |
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Students' achievements have increased since the previous monitoring visit. Between 2005/06 and 2006/07, the overall headline success rate increased by 2% to 61%, and the overall pass rate rose by 5% to 79%, although the overall retention rate fell by 3% to 77%. These overall rates are all significantly below the national averages for similar colleges and the rate of improvement is too slow, as acknowledged by the college's self-assessment report. The skills for life programmes account for around one third of examination entries for the college and it is in this area that the college

particularly requires improvements. Other significant qualifications provided by the college have generally shown a good rate of improvement. Success rates for vocational programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3 have increased over the previous three years by 16%, 11% and 20% respectively, AS rates also increased by 11% in the last year, although A2 subjects show a 6% fall.

Value added data from the ALPS scheme indicates the college has improved in the previous year and the overall achievement of level 3 students is satisfactory and in line with what would be expected, based on their prior GCSE results. Analysis of the ALIS value added scheme shows that a significant number of subjects have achieved better than expected over the past three years, including A level sciences, English literature, government and politics and French, and BTEC national diplomas in science, IT and music. A small number of subjects have recorded low value added performance, for example A level drama and theatre, and economics.

Current rates of retention for 2007/08 are almost 90% which is well above the figure for the previous year, although it is too soon to know whether this will translate into improved end-of-year figures. Similarly, results from January 2008 AS examinations indicate that 70% of students taking these papers improved their grades, although final pass rates will depend on the collated results for all modules.

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| Achievement on courses at levels 1 and 2 in vocational areas | Significant progress |
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Overall success rates for level 1 and 2 vocational courses have improved between 2004/05 and 2006/07 by 16% and 11% respectively. Some courses, such as BTEC First Diplomas in media, art and design, applied science and business recorded success rates of over 80%.

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| Retention rates on level 1 courses | Insufficient progress |
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Retention rates have dropped generally in the college and the overall retention rate for level 1 courses has not improved since 2003/04, when it was 74%. However, they are good on some level 1 vocational courses, for example skills for life – ESOL at 89% and introductory diploma in art, design and media at 94%.

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| Success rates for GCSE English and mathematics courses | Significant progress |
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The proportion of students gaining grade A* - C in GCSE mathematics and English has improved significantly since the previous monitoring visit. The grade A* - C success rate for GCSE mathematics increased from 30% in 2005/06 to 59% in 2006/07 and the respective figures for GCSE English are 36% to 57%. These rates

are above the national average for similar colleges and are a reflection of the work by staff implementing the action plans.

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| Success rates in key skills | Insufficient progress |
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The college provides key skills provision through adult numeracy and literacy provision and GCSE mathematics and English. The previous inspection reported success rates in key skills as an area for improvement. Overall success rates for the level 1 and 2 numeracy and literacy courses provided by the college are all below the national averages for similar colleges. Staff training has taken place in key skills for teachers and managers, however, relatively few students take level 2 literacy and numeracy. The delivery of key skills is integrated with subjects in some curriculum areas, but this is patchy across the college.

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| Attendance and punctuality | Reasonable progress |
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The college has set an overall target for students' attendance of 83%. College data shows it was 81% in 2006/07 and 79% for the current year. However, this apparent dip in attendance rates is partly attributable to more stringent recording of lateness and attendance than was the case previously. College staff have taken action to improve attendance rates and the indications are that this is working.

Quality of provision

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| The quality of teaching on many vocational courses at all levels | Reasonable progress |
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The self-assessment report is explicit in its evaluation that there is too much teaching and learning that is only satisfactory. In 2006/07, 47% of observed lessons were judged to be satisfactory and 50% good or better. A greater number of lesson observations have been carried out during 2007/08 and the results of these observations confirm there is still insufficient teaching that is good or better, particularly on level 1 and 2 courses. However, these judgements have been taken in the context of a far more rigorous framework for judging the quality of teaching and learning than in previous years. Moderation of the grading of lesson observations is more systematic. Further accredited training in the observation of teaching and learning has taken place. An observation scheme has been introduced where curriculum managers observe lessons alongside a senior manager, and a large number of joint observations now take place.

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| Additional support to meet the language and literacy needs of all students | Reasonable progress |
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The college has introduced a number of strategies to improve the additional support provided for literacy and language. Staff development has taken place and a new skills for life policy and procedures have been introduced. The monitoring and recording of students' progress is also more systematic which helps ensure the language and literacy needs of students are being met.

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| Staff and students' information and learning technology (ILT) skills. | Reasonable progress |
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A variety of staff training events have taken place, involving external consultants and sharing good practice sessions. Teachers and students report an increase in the use of ILT within lessons. Resources such as data projectors and interactive whiteboards are generally available within classrooms. The use of ILT in lesson observations is often considered in the performance review process for teachers. It is now a requirement that all teachers and managers are observed teaching and the session is judged to be good before recruitment takes place. However, the development of a proposed virtual learning environment within the college is slow.

Leadership and management

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| The implementation of cross-college procedures in teaching, learning and assessment | Reasonable progress |
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The principal and senior managers have a realistic approach to the current shortcomings in cross-college procedures, which are reported in the self-assessment report. They have reviewed cross-college procedures and put forward new processes in an effort to improve consistency and the quality of provision. These include placing four departments into "special measures", with enhanced monitoring of performance by managers. Regular meetings take place between senior managers and curriculum managers and the sharing of working practices is encouraged strongly. Managers now focus on auditing compliance to procedures and processes. The consistency of evaluating the quality of teaching and learning across the college has improved. The self-evaluation report indicates there is still some inconsistency of assessment practices. However, managers have placed a strong focus on monitoring the quality of individual learning plans, and the grades that tutors predicted students will achieve in their examinations, to improve their accuracy compared with previous years.