

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Middlesbrough College

Date of visit: 23 September 2008

Context

Middlesbrough College is a general further education (GFE) and is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the Tees Valley. Its mission statement is to provide excellent opportunities to encourage and support learners in achieving their full potential. The college has a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in hospitality and two partnership CoVEs in transport and logistics, and adult health and care. In August 2008, the college relocated from four sites across Middlesbrough into a new single campus development located close to the centre of the town. A significant amount of hard work and commitment from staff across the college, in the very short time available, has ensured that the new college was made ready to receive learners at the start of September. The new accommodation is providing much enhanced facilities for learners and staff. Full- and part-time learner enrolments to date are significantly above targets for 2008/09.

The college was last inspected in February 2008. At that inspection the college's capacity to improve was judged to be good, all other aspects were satisfactory. Provision in the sector subject areas inspected was judged to be good in three, satisfactory in two and inadequate in one area, science and mathematics.

This was the first monitoring visit since the full inspection.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates, particularly at level 3?	Reasonable progress
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Although it is too early for 2008 achievement data to be finalised there are clear signs of improvement. At level 1 retention has improved and conservative college projections show an increase in the success rates for learners aged 16-18 and those aged 19 and over. At level 2, college data shows that success rates have continued to improve to above the previous year's high rates.

At level 3, where success rates were low in 2007, retention has improved, markedly so for learners aged 19 and over. The success rates on vocational courses for learners aged 16-18 have already surpassed those for last year, with data still outstanding, and the GCE A level success rate has improved. For learners aged 19 and over, the college projected success rates on vocational courses also show significant improvements in 2008.

However, progress in improving success rates on GCE AS level courses is very limited. For 16-18 year old learners the success rate has remained static at 58%, which is below the 2007 national average for similar colleges, and for learners aged 19 and over, the rate at 52% is also below the national average. Since the inspection the college has put a range of actions in place to support improvements. However, as these are in the early stages of implementation it is not possible to measure their impact.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of arrangements for observing teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the rigour of the college's arrangements for observing teaching and learning. Since the inspection there has been strong senior leadership to help to ensure that all teachers take responsibility for improving the quality of their lessons. The recently appointed assistant principal for teaching and learning is now established in the role and is providing good support to the head of teaching and learning. Policies and procedures for observation have been thoroughly revised in consultation with staff. The new arrangements being implemented from the start of this academic year have effectively addressed issues raised at the previous inspection. Documentation has been streamlined and is focused on providing individual teachers with a clear action plan for improvement. The outcomes from the process are now linked to the appraisal scheme and performance management systems.

The roles and responsibilities of the directors and deputy directors of programme areas have been revised to ensure that they have a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. They now carry out the majority of observations. This has freed up the enhanced team of learning mentors to provide increased levels of support to teachers. Useful staff development has been provided for observers in how to implement the new arrangements. Comprehensive guidance on the procedures and on the characteristics of effective teaching are provided for teachers and observers in a handbook available on the college intranet.

Much work has taken place to ensure that there is a well-planned programme of activities to support teachers to improve. These include weekly drop in sessions providing one-to-one support, regular early morning and twilight professional development sessions, good practice forums and structured peer observations. Procedures have been put in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of staff development and support on the performance of individual teachers and the quality of teaching across the college.

Leadership and management

How successful have managers been in improving the consistency of the implementation of arrangements for quality assurance?	Reasonable progress
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A significant amount of work has taken place to establish mechanisms to help to ensure that quality assurance systems are applied consistently this academic year. The college's strategic priorities for the next three years are focused on meeting local, regional and national priorities and on the need to improve the quality of the provision. The latter includes key objectives, targets and action plans relating to the implementation of rigorous quality frameworks and the improvement of teaching and learning. The new assistant principal roles are closely aligned to the achievement of the strategic priorities and simpler planning frameworks have been introduced so that performance against objectives can be monitored and reported to governors more effectively. The membership of the senior management team has been extended to include the assistant principals which is improving communications and giving a higher profile to quality improvement.

Formats for reporting to governors on the quality of the curriculum have been revised and good support is being provided to directors on how to carry out this task. The new reports are focused on progress in achieving key objectives such as success rates and the quality of teaching and learning. More work is taking place to ensure that reports keep governors well informed about issues relating to the quality of the provision. Regular performance management meetings between senior managers and directors are being used to increase levels of accountability through closer monitoring of progress against key targets and highlighting areas of underperformance. These meetings have also been effective in improving communications between senior and middle managers.

Since the inspection, and as part of the preparation for the move to a single campus, a thorough review of the previously diverse management structures within directorates has been carried out. Consistent management and team structures have been put in place supported by standard job descriptions and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for staff. This clarity and the move onto one campus are helping to facilitate the sharing of good practice at all levels of the college. Recent examples include effective strategies to improve retention, arrangements for monitoring learners' attendance, and for supporting those at risk of leaving college.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in science and mathematics?	Reasonable progress
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A well-planned strategy is being implemented to improve provision in this area. New staff have been appointed and all aspects of the provision have been analysed to identify where improvements are needed. Improving teaching and learning, more thorough monitoring of schemes of work and better integration of assessment have

a high priority in improvement actions. Increased time allocated to teaching is being used for greater consolidation of learning, and team teaching has been introduced where appropriate. The sharing of good practice has improved since the inspection and is being enhanced further by the move to a single campus. Team working is improving within the department and across other areas of the curriculum. The use of the much improved facilities for information and communication technology, available in the new accommodation, to support improvements in teaching and learning is developing well. Communication between staff and learners has also improved by the move to one site, supported by more rigorous tutorial arrangements and processes for following up learners who miss lessons.

The entry criteria have been adapted to ensure learners are enrolled on a course best suited to their needs and there is increased diagnostic assessment at the start of each course. This assessment covers generic as well as subject specific skills and enables staff to highlight potential issues early in the course and to put appropriate support strategies in place. Subject individual learning plans, piloted in A level biology, have been rolled out and are already helping learners to stay on track and increasing their motivation. Arrangements to monitor learners' progress have been tightened. More frequent staff meetings are focused on checking that all students are on track and learner focus groups have input into the improvement programme.

Although it is too early to see the impact of many of these initiatives, due to the timing of this visit, some positive signs can already be seen.