

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Leyton Sixth Form College

Date of visit: 18 March 2009

Context

Leyton Sixth Form College, located in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, recruits around 1900 students. Most students are aged 16-18 and studying full-time and around three-quarters are from minority ethnic groups. Approximately 80% of students are on level 3 long courses and around three-quarters of these are studying GCE A levels. The college also offers level 2 programmes and some provision at entry and level 1. For the purpose of comparison with other similar institutions, the college is categorised as having a high 'widening participation factor'.

The college had monitoring visits in 2007 and 2008. The last full inspection was in 2006. Capacity to improve and achievement and standards were judged to be good. Overall effectiveness, quality of provision and leadership and management were graded as satisfactory. Of the five curriculum areas inspected provision was good in three and satisfactory in two.

Achievement and standards

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| To what extent did success rates improve in 2007/08? | Reasonable progress |
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The overall success rate in 2007/08 of 83% represents a modest improvement on the previous year and is above the 2006/07 national average, when compared to similar colleges. Whilst the overall success rate has remained above average over the last three years, the national average has been rising at a faster pace than the college's success rate.

There are variations in GCE A level success rates but, on the whole, AS level students make satisfactory progress, whilst A2 students make better progress than expected. In 2007/08, success rates improved on level 3 vocational courses but declined slightly at levels 1 and 2. There were improvements in 2007/08, in terms of retention, achievement and success rates in most sector subject areas (SSAs). The relatively low overall success rate in SSA 14 was due primarily to poor AS results for general studies. This course, along with AS French, AS physical education and A2 philosophy, is subject to what the college calls 'special measures'. Swift action has been taken to improve performance. A further 25 courses have been identified as

'causes for concern', and have been allocated appropriate support and monitoring, to ensure that the current cohorts of students achieve as well as they should.

In-year retention for 2008/09 suggests a modest improvement overall compared to last year, reflecting a rise in some areas and a decline in others.

Quality of provision

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| To what extent are students encouraged to 'aim higher?' | Reasonable progress |
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The students interviewed, representing different curriculum areas and levels, were very positive about the ways in which tutors encourage them to aim higher. They cite the quality of the individual support they receive as a key factor in their success. They value the teaching and find feedback on assignments very helpful. The students have found master classes in higher education, additional academic support at college and work placements valuable in helping them to develop further their knowledge and skills. Students are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to improve. Students acknowledge that individual learning plans (ILPs) and tutorials help to motivate them to do as well as they can.

The ILPs reviewed contain all the documentation pertaining to a students' progress during a course, including a useful summary of one-to-one reviews. Target-setting is helpful in identifying areas for improvement, although as college staff acknowledge, better use could be made of value-added data in the formative assessment of students' progress. Plans are well advanced to implement a new electronic progress tracking system, to ensure greater transparency and consistency.

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| What has the college done to involve employers in course provision and work placements? | Reasonable progress |
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There are many examples across different curriculum areas of the involvement of employers. Most students benefit from visits to external organisations, presentations from employers and practitioners and, on vocational courses, work placements. Work placements are well established in health and social care and play a key role in helping students to develop the knowledge and skills they need. Students on level 1 and level 3 travel and tourism courses have appropriate placements and there are plans to include level 2 students in this arrangement. Work placements are organised for students on vocational business courses. To ensure that the placement is appropriate and useful, tutors attempt to link the activity to specific units on the programme and also to students' career plans and aspirations. Not all students on vocational computing and ICT courses gain placements.

Leadership and management

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| How do equality and diversity policies, and a commitment to community cohesion, translate into actions? | Significant progress |
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The college undertakes a detailed analysis of performance data by gender, ethnicity and disability. The self-assessment report indicates that in 2007/08 Bangladeshi students achieved less well than other groups, despite relatively high retention, when compared to the college's average. This does not reflect a long-term trend but college managers address actual and potential differences in success in a number of ways. For example, managers ensure that students from particular groups are involved in awards ceremonies; they work with external agencies and groups; they invite into the college speakers from different minority ethnic groups. The college has identified as priorities the need to address the relative underachievement of males and also to revise its equality impact assessment process.

The students interviewed emphasised that they feel safe within the college. The college has a policy of zero tolerance towards any form of harassment or bullying and this is understood and valued by students. College staff work hard to maintain a safe and inclusive environment. As well as activities throughout the year that focus on equality themes, teachers confidently embed aspects of cultural and social diversity in their lessons and are well supported by the new leadership team.

The college makes a strong contribution to community cohesion. Community groups use college premises in the evenings and external speakers, vetted in advance, are welcomed. Students actively engage in discussions around local and national issues, through both faith and inter-faith groups.