

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Stockton Riverside College

Date of visit: 3 June 2009

Context

Stockton Riverside College (SRC) has served local communities, employers and organisations for 65 years. In 2003 the college relocated from two separate premises in Stockton and Billingham to the present site at Teesdale in Thornaby. An addition to the main campus, SRC Two was opened in September 2006 providing high quality workshop-based learning accommodation and more social space. In 2007/08 the college merged with Bede Sixth Form College.

The unemployment rate across the Tees Valley is 3.8%, higher than the national rate of 2.4%. Some of the college's local catchments include several of the most disadvantaged and deprived wards in the country. The attainment rate across Stockton is improving at the age of 16, and was 55.3% in 2007 for five or more GCSE grades A* to C. It continues to be a focus of attention for the college. Part of the college's mission is to maximise their contribution to widening and extending participation in further education. Off-campus activities with community, regeneration, employer and enterprise linked organisations, continue to add value to the economy and community life.

The college was last inspected in June 2006. At that inspection, the overall effectiveness of the college was judged to be good. Leadership and management, capacity to improve and social inclusion were outstanding. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision were judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress is the college making in raising success rates on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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The success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult students have improved consistently but at a modest rate for several years. During this period the success rates for both age groups have lost ground in relation to the improving national averages for similar colleges. Neither rate places the college clearly in the bottom quartile for similar colleges by these measures.

The success rates by level for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses show:

- At level 1 the rate improved significantly in 2006/07 and was then maintained in 2007/08.
- At level 2 the rate fluctuated but showed a modest improvement overall
- At level 3 the rate fluctuated but showed a modest decline overall

And for adults they show:

- At level 1 the rate improved significantly
- At level 2 the rate declined steadily
- At level 3 the rate improved significantly

The college self-assessment clearly and accurately identifies the issues and provides a realistic account of achievement and standards in the college. Key areas for improvement are identified and new strategies are in place that take account of the rapidly changing situation brought about by the recent merger.

Quality of provision

What progress is being made in continuing to improve teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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The college now has a well established system for observing teaching and learning. Recent refinements including a general tightening up of moderation and evaluation of observations has resulted in a system that is realistically expected to raise the standard. Managers and staff are now ensuring that the system is applied correctly and rigorously.

Developments in information learning technology (ILT) in the classroom continue. Minimum standards have been set and with the advent of the new buildings there is a very good infrastructure to support increased use of technology, particularly in teaching and learning.

'Learning squares', a new system of peer observation is proving to be particularly effective and popular amongst teachers and support staff. It allows them to observe how their colleagues in other areas operate in the classroom. The system is voluntary and after a cautious start staff are now keen to join in and share their good practice. Mixed teams of four from different curriculum areas, each observing the others are highly effective in encouraging co-operation between staff who would otherwise never work together. This form of team working is building college-wide teams and encouraging teachers and support staff to adopt new and innovative techniques of teaching, support and classroom and learning management.

How effectively has key skills delivery been integrated into vocational courses since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection there has been improved integration of key skills into the programme structure of vocational courses. Key skills tutors are actively involved in vocational programme induction activities as well as course delivery throughout the year. The key skill delivery model for programmes has been particularly successful, they are flexible and adaptable to changing needs. For example, a new two week delivery model has been trialled in the current year in five curriculum areas. Results to date indicate that achievement and retention has increased in the areas targeted. A seamless integration of key skills has been promoted alongside the development of programme knowledge and skills. This structure has been enthusiastically welcomed by both staff and learners. Good links have been developed between vocational programme tutors, key skills tutors and personal tutors to strengthen the promotion and monitoring of key skills. This is now beginning to have an impact on learner outcomes. Pass rates have improved significantly on level 1 courses. However, the college recognises the need to improve pass rates at level 2 on Application of Number and Communication courses. In self-assessment this is rightly recognised as a key challenge in responding to local learning needs. Key skills are well managed with an enthusiastic, able and engaged staff.

Leadership and management

How well has quality assurance been embedded in the post-merger college?	Significant progress
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The college continues to build upon the strong quality assurance systems recognised at the last Ofsted inspection. Data continues to be used effectively to inform performance analysis and to drive improvement strategies. In particular the component parts of Stockton Riverside College are using the recognised strengths of each other to evaluate, develop and promote improvement across the whole institution. Following the merger of Bede Sixth Form College into Stockton Riverside College quality assurance systems and processes have been fully co-ordinated and integrated across the new college. For example the collection, evaluation and analysis of in-year data is now fully integrated into the quality systems of Bede Sixth Form. A detailed interrogation at course programme level takes place and data is used to support and inform the teaching and learning observation system. Bede Sixth Form has enthusiastically embraced the teacher 'learning square' groups that effectively promote improvement and the dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning. Managers are very adept at identifying strong performance and using it to promote and share best practice between staff. Good and realistic self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. A strong focus on learners and learners' outcomes can be identified across college systems and practice. The co-ordination and embedding of quality assurance systems across Stockton Riverside

College has been seamless, effective and beneficial to all component parts of the institution.

What progress has been made in ensuring more effective and timely data collection?	Significant progress
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Comparisons between the number of achievements not claimed in the current year with the same period in the previous year show that recent changes to the management structure and reporting arrangements have been effective. The more efficient reporting of achievements has contributed to better use of data in managing the provision and in self-assessment.

What progress has been made since the merger in integrating the two former colleges?	Significant progress
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The college Principal and senior managers have excellent strategic vision that has helped the college to make a significant contribution to the integration of local education and the tackling of local learning needs. This vision is supported by successful operational plans to transform the campuses of the previously separate institutions into an exciting learning environment. The post-merger management structure is suited ideally to realise the strategic vision.