

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Queen Mary's College

Date of visit: 19 May 2009

Context

Queen Mary's College is a sixth form college located in Basingstoke. In 2008/09, 2,279 full-time 16 to 18 year old students and 650 funded adult learners attended the college, meaning approximately 94% of the student population are aged 16 to 18. Some 6% of students are of minority ethnic heritage, which is higher than the local population. The very large majority of young people follow GCE AS or A-level programmes. Part-time provision is available for 14 to 16 year olds from local secondary schools. The proportion of young people gaining five GCSE grade A* to C including English and mathematics in Basingstoke schools ranges from 25% to 65%. Students enrolling at the college for AS and A-level courses have 5.6 and 5.7 GCSE passes respectively. Employment in Basingstoke is mainly in retail, information and communication technology (ICT) and public services. The unemployment rate is low at 2.6% and 5.6% of young people in the area are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made since the previous inspection in improving achievements and standards since the previous inspection?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has demonstrated a clear trend of steady improvement, both in success rates and the progress made by individual students in relation to their qualifications at enrolment, while operating an open and inclusive enrolment policy. Overall success rates at level 3 improved further in 2007/08, bringing the college in line with the national average for sixth form colleges. However, a significant degree of variability still exists within and across curriculum areas. Success rates have improved for both A- and AS-level qualifications, rates for the latter improving by 10 percentage points over a four year period. The overall progress made by AS students in 2007/08, relative to their qualifications at enrolment, improved to outstanding, having been excellent the previous year. A-level students have made excellent progress for the last two years. However, students continue to make insufficient progress in a minority of subjects. The college has expanded its vocational provision and students following these courses in 2007/08 made excellent progress although success rates are variable across programmes. The retention rate for long courses at level 3 was 90% in 2007/8 and 94% at the time of the visit, indicating continuing improvement.

The college is committed to broadening opportunities for young people and enrolments at level 2 have almost doubled since the previous inspection. Although overall success rates declined in 2007/08 at this level, to below the national average, due to students' below average performance in additional enrichment programmes followed by level 3 students. Those following first diploma programmes succeed well and progression rates to level 3 qualifications are good. At 93%, retention rates for these programmes were high at the time of the visit. The college offers GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science and the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades in 2007/08 was above the national average for similar colleges. Opportunities for students to follow level 1 programmes have increased since the previous inspection, as have the numbers of students enrolling at this level. Success rates have improved significantly from 56% in 2004/05 to 73% in 2007/08 which is at the national average for sixth form colleges.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the college?	Reasonable progress
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College lesson observation records indicate the quality of teaching and learning to be improving steadily. Lesson observation is an integral aspect of the management of the college and is viewed constructively and supported by staff. All teachers are observed three or four times a year as part of an ongoing process of evaluation and development. Paired lesson observations have been introduced for each teacher to help moderate judgements and share good practice. Curriculum managers are allocated specific time to conduct observations and have a clearly defined role in driving improvements. The use of expert practitioners helps improve teaching practice and the implementation of improvement strategies, particularly in ensuring teaching meets the needs of individual students. External quality review arrangements through collaborative working with other colleges supports self-assessment, clarification of areas for improvement and dissemination of good practice.

What actions have been taken to improve the effectiveness of tutorial arrangements and the monitoring of students' progress?	Significant progress
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Group tutorials have been reduced to 30 minutes per week, enabling tutors to conduct regular and timely individual tutorials with students. Procedures for monitoring the progress made by individual students are much improved and value-added data is used well to set targets. Tutors and teachers have access to a single electronic source of information relating to students' attendance, performance in assessed work and related information. Students' performance against target grades is immediately apparent. Students speak highly of the approach adopted in terms of both the clarity it provides concerning their performance and the timely support it triggers when necessary. The approach enables tutors, teachers and support staff to work together effectively and intervene early where the performance of individual students may be slipping or where support needs become apparent. The records of

individual students are routinely audited and the information used to both help monitor the effectiveness of assessment arrangements and help identify aspects of courses where teaching and learning may not be fully effective in helping students achieve their potential.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in promoting equality and diversity?	Reasonable progress.
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The college is committed to promoting equality of opportunity as demonstrated by the growing opportunities offered to students outside the A-level curriculum, the support provided to individual students and the many links and partnerships forged with different community organisations. The college is very mindful of the needs of the full range of minority and disadvantaged groups in developing its curriculum. A single equality scheme is in place which facilitates the monitoring of key indicators of performance. Schemes of work are audited annually to monitor the way in which the curriculum promotes equality and diversity and lesson observation arrangements make specific comment on impact through teaching. A good range of activities are provided to support equality and diversity both through group tutorials and specific activities and events.