

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Woking College

Date of visit: 18 June 2009

Context

Woking College is a small sixth form college serving the Borough of Woking and surrounding areas of Surrey. In addition to its main site the college has a community-based information technology centre, an art studio in the Lightbox gallery and a football academy. Woking College is the only college in the borough although two Beacon sixth form colleges, two school sixth forms and two general further education colleges are located within 15 miles.

For Surrey overall, 57% of pupils gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2008. The proportion for Woking schools in the same year ranged from 35% to 63%. The college attracts 25% of its students from the lower performing schools and some 60% of students aged 16 to 19 travel from neighbouring parts of Surrey. The average GCSE score in 2007/08 for students on entry to college was 5.7 (B/C average).

Provision is offered in 14 of the 15 sector subject areas although numbers in some of these areas are very small. In 2008/09, 856 students aged 16 to 19 were enrolled at the college, most of whom were following full-time programmes at level 3. Adult students number 395, the equivalent of 111 full-time students. Unemployment in Surrey is less than 1%, although Woking includes an area of relative deprivation from which the college draws a significant proportion of students. The minority ethnic population of the college is 25.5% compared with 9% in the borough.

The college was inspected in October/November 2007. Two of the four curriculum areas inspected were judged good and two satisfactory. Effectiveness of provision and achievements and standards were found to be satisfactory and quality of provision, leadership and management, and capacity to improve were judged good. The previous college monitoring visit was in June 2008.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made since the previous inspection in improving success rates?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Success rates overall have improved considerably and in 2007/08, AS and A2 success rates were 82% and 96% respectively. Particularly good improvements have been made to level 1 course success rates which are now above the national average at

85%. Many students have low attainment levels on entry and value-added data for 2007/08 indicate that most make satisfactory to good progress. The college has particularly high value-added scores in numerous areas, for example art and media, accounting, biology and many language courses.

The proportion of high grades in many areas has risen and the college now sets targets for the achievement of grades A/B. Performance indicators are shared with curriculum department heads twice a term. In 2007/08 those on AS level courses achieving high grades rose by four percentage points to 37% and A2 high grades have improved by five percentage points to 46%. The college has introduced stronger procedures to improve attendance and punctuality, and targets have been set to further improve in the next academic year.

The college has recently introduced a retention and progression policy. Procedures introduced last year for identifying students at risk of under-achieving have started to have an impact. Retention rates on long courses have improved, and in 2007/08 retention overall was 94%. In-year retention rates in 2008/09 for those on similar courses are 96%.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to further improve the quality of teaching and learning following the previous inspection?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Clear standards have been set for teaching and learning and the college has produced a protocol for teachers to be able to identify the characteristics of good and outstanding lessons. The college has placed a stronger emphasis on observing and improving learning. Lesson observation guidance has recently been re-written to include clearer procedures for grading and feedback to staff. Lesson observations are undertaken regularly by well trained staff and these are moderated internally, and by experienced staff from other local colleges. However, the written commentary on lessons judged to be outstanding is not sufficiently detailed to reflect the grade awarded.

Peer observations have been established since the previous inspection and these have started to have a positive impact on improving technique and sharing of best practice. Staff development following observations continues to be good. Interactive whiteboards are now in use in all classrooms and all staff have been trained in their use.

The recent piloting of a 'learning community' project where students are given more responsibility for their own learning has been successful, and there are plans to further extend this. This initiative has also ensured more parental and employer contribution into the learning process.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve the rigour of self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the rigour of self-assessment, and better use is now made of data to inform the process. Departmental heads have good access to data in a more understandable format than at the previous inspection, and trends in retention and attendance are more thoroughly analysed, as are success rates by gender and ethnicity. Staff have a good opportunity to contribute to the process and student views and survey data is now well used. Governors are fully involved in the self-assessment process and are kept well informed.

The self-assessment report is sufficiently judgemental although it is lengthy and contains much descriptive text. Some strengths identified are considered no more than normal practice and there is some conflict between strengths and areas for improvement in a small proportion of curriculum areas. Progress against action plans is thoroughly checked.