

Middlesbrough College

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

Middlesbrough College was inspected in February 2008. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in science and mathematics which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for reinspecting all provision that is inadequate. The inadequate subject area was reinspected on 7 and 8 October 2009.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Science and mathematics	4	4

Context

The college offers mainly advanced level courses that include GCE AS and A-level options in psychology, biology, chemistry and mathematics, and the national certificate in applied science (forensic science). Around 250 learners aged 16 to 18 and 20 aged over 19 are enrolled on advanced level courses. Forty learners aged 16 to 18 and 64 aged over 19 are enrolled on GCSE courses in mathematics, human physiology and health and science.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are inadequate. The overall success rates at both GCE AS and A level fell in 2008/09 to below the national average and are low. Success rates vary significantly between subjects; most are not improving and some are very low. Overall retention rates are satisfactory, but pass rates are low.
- At A level, success rates on biology and psychology are high. On chemistry, mathematics and physics they are low.
- Success rates on AS psychology and biology courses are around the national average and are satisfactory. However, on mathematics, physics and chemistry the rates are not improving and are very low.
- Learners aged 16 to 18 studying GCSE mathematics make poor progress. The success rate for those attaining a grade A* to C is in line with the low national average. Too few learners who do not attain an A* to C grade improve on their previous grade. For learners aged over 19 the success rate is high.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved and are now satisfactory. In the better sessions teachers plan their lessons well and use good quality worksheets and electronic resources to engage and motivate learners. Where teaching needs to improve further, particularly in AS level sessions, teachers do not use questioning techniques effectively to ensure that all learners understand and make progress.
- Team working across the subject area has improved. However, not all teachers have opportunities to share good practice with other subject specialists.

- The range of subjects offered has been reviewed and the national certificate in applied science now offers a vocational pathway. However, the college does not provide a full range of science options as AS and A-level physics and chemistry will not be offered in future.
- Initial advice and guidance have improved and are now satisfactory. Entry requirements have been increased appropriately to help to ensure that learners are enrolled on the correct level of course.
- Additional learning support is poorly planned and insufficient to meet the needs of learners. Although the use of diagnostic testing has increased, the outcomes are not used effectively to ensure that all learners receive the subject specific support they need throughout their courses.
- Leadership and management of the subject area are inadequate. Performance management has been insufficient to ensure that staff comply fully with the college's improvement initiatives. For example, subject-based individual learning plans are not always used well to set learners' targets and monitor their progress. Arrangements to identify and support learners who are underperforming have not been sufficiently robust.

What does Middlesbrough College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment. In particular improve teachers' use of questioning techniques so that they can assess all learners' progress and help them to improve.
- Monitor learners' progress more thoroughly by strengthening assessment of written work so that they understand the level they are working at and what they need to do to attain their target grades.
- Ensure that there is sufficient subject specific learning support to help all learners make progress.
- Strengthen performance management in the subject area to ensure that college policies and procedures are implemented rigorously by all staff.
- Analyse and evaluate the underlying causes of the poor progress made by learners aged 16 to 18 on GCSE mathematics and devise and implement appropriate strategies to improve achievement.
- Develop risk management strategies for subjects where there is only one specialist teacher.

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Middlesbrough College is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the Tees Valley. Its mission is to provide excellent opportunities to encourage and support learners in achieving their full potential. The college offers further education courses in 14 of the 15 subject areas, bespoke provision for employers, and higher education provision franchised from the University of Teesside. In 2008/09 the college enrolled 3,221 learners aged 16 to 18 and 5,113 aged 19 and over. This represents a growth of 14% in enrolments of 16-18 year-olds. In August 2008, the college relocated from four sites across Middlesbrough to a new campus close to the town centre.

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 subject areas inspected was judged to be good in three, satisfactory in two and inadequate in one area, science and mathematics.

At the first monitoring visit following the full inspection, carried out in September 2008, the college was making reasonable progress in improving: success rates; the rigour of arrangements for observation of teaching and learning; the implementation of quality assurance; and the quality of provision in science and mathematics.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What improvements have there been in arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection the college's capacity to improve was judged to be good. Reasonable progress has been made to maintain this position. Strategic and operational planning processes are focused well on improving the experience for learners and ensuring that the college has the financial resources to deliver its objectives. The college sets itself ambitious targets and has robust arrangements to monitor progress. The new accommodation provides high quality learning resources and a safe and welcoming environment. Enrolments of learners aged 16 to 18 have increased significantly over the last two years. Success rates have continued to improve. Actions to improve the quality of provision in science and mathematics have not been effective.

Outcomes for learners

What do data for 2008/09 show about the progress made in improving success rates, particularly at advanced level? Reasonable progress

Success rates on long courses for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved at all levels each year since the last inspection. College data for 2008/09 show that the rates at foundation and intermediate level are above national average and are good. At advanced level the rate is now satisfactory. For learners aged over 19 there were good improvements in 2007/08 at all levels. In 2008/09 rates have remained steady. At intermediate and advanced level they are above the national average and are good. At foundation level the rate is satisfactory.

Success rates on vocational courses, on which most learners are enrolled, have improved well and all levels are now above the national average. However, on GCE AS and A-level courses success rates have not improved sufficiently. In 2008/09 the A-level rates for both age groups declined to below the national averages. At AS level, although the rate has improved over the last three years for 16-18 year-olds, it remains below the national average and is low. At subject level there is significant variation in rates of improvement. Some subjects that were previously performing well have declined and others have been low for a number of years.

What progress has been made in improving success rates on work-based learning and Train to Gain? Reasonable progress

The high overall and timely success rates on Train to Gain courses, reported on at the last inspection, have improved further. College data for 2008/09 show significant improvements in Skills for Life courses. At advanced level the success rate has improved and is now around the national average.

Success rates on apprenticeship programmes improved significantly in 2007/08. However, in 2008/09 they declined and are now satisfactory. Through very effective use of data and rigorous monitoring of learners' progress, managers have identified the under-performing areas and appropriate improvement plans are being implemented. Some course reviews are not sufficiently focused on provision for employers and resulting improvement actions lack detail.

The college has implemented effective strategies to clarify lines of responsibility for improving quality on Train to Gain and work-based learning programmes. Directors of subject areas now have responsibility for monitoring progress in implementing improvement plans. Frequent cross-college meetings have improved communication across the college and are used effectively to share good practice.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring that teaching and learning meet the needs of all learners? Significant progress

Since the last inspection senior and other managers have prioritised the need to improve teaching and learning and have set high standards. Significant progress has been made in achieving the college's ambition that all teaching is good or better. Teachers have a clear understanding of the expected high levels of performance.

Arrangements for observing teaching and learning are much improved and implemented meticulously. Observations are planned taking into account variations in subject performance and cover all teachers and tutors. Frequent and thorough moderation of judgements made and grades awarded is now standard practice. The outcomes from observation are linked very well to individual teacher and whole college improvement plans. Directors monitor rigorously the completion of action plans resulting from observations. All teachers judged to be less than good receive mandatory training and support from learning mentors. An extensive range of well planned staff development sessions is provided to support all teachers to improve. These interventions are successfully improving quality in most areas. However, the college is aware that a small minority of teaching is still poorly planned and fails to engage all learners. Teaching in science and mathematics has improved and is now satisfactory.

How much progress has been made in improving arrangements for tutorials and target setting to monitor learners' progress? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, the college has completed a thorough review of tutorial provision and the processes for monitoring learners' progress. All staff have attended useful training in how to record measurable and meaningful targets for learners. Good practice is reinforced through small group forums. Personal tutors now use prior attainment data and the outcomes of initial assessment more effectively to set learners' individual targets for achievement. The college has invested in more personal tutors and mentors to support learners and help them to achieve. Most learners have a clear understanding of their individual targets, are increasingly involved in setting personal targets and feel well supported by tutors and teachers. The college completes effective quality audits of learners' review records. However, audit planning takes insufficient account of variations in subject performance. Following a well executed pilot that has taken into account the views of staff and learners, the college is in the first stages of implementing a fully electronic monitoring system.

Leadership and management

How much progress have managers made in improving the implementation of quality assurance arrangements? Reasonable progress

The previous inspection identified that quality assurance arrangements were securing improvements but these were not consistent. Since then effective action has been taken to help to ensure that systems are implemented consistently across the provision. Increased resources have been put in place to audit compliance in areas such as the completion of course and tutorial reviews. Robust arrangements are in place to moderate the outcomes from self-assessment and observation of teaching and learning. College managers take part in external peer review activities that provide good development opportunities. Staff have good access to management information that is used well to analyse and evaluate the quality of the experience provided for learners. Processes for course review have improved since the inspection and further work is taking place to streamline the arrangements using electronic systems. Arrangements for reporting to the governors have improved since the inspection.

Learners' views about the quality of the provision are taken seriously by the college. However, learners feel they do not get enough feedback on the outcomes and actions taken by the college in response to student questionnaires. This year learners' representative groups have been established to increase their involvement in the review of the quality of the provision.

Quality assurance is now supporting improvements in most areas of the curriculum. However, leaders and managers have made slow progress in identifying and resolving the underlying causes of the low success rates on GCE AS and A-level provision.

What actions have taken place to improve the varying quality of curriculum management? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the quality of curriculum management varied from good to inadequate. Directors and deputy directors are now established in their roles. Their respective responsibilities and accountabilities are clear. They work together well to share good practice and solve problems. A lot of work has taken place to develop and implement rigorous systems for performance management that are driving improvements in standards in most areas of the college. These are now clearly defined and linked well to the college's strategic objectives and its procedures for quality assurance and self-assessment. Arrangements for teachers' individual performance appraisal have improved significantly. Curriculum management has improved and is now more consistent. However, the leadership and management of science and mathematics remain inadequate.

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