

# St Vincent College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Unique reference number: 108387

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Last day of inspection: 18 November 2009

Type of provider: Sixth form college

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

St Vincent College is a sixth form college in Gosport, Hampshire. The college has around 1000 full-time students, the vast majority of whom are aged 16 to 18. Around 90% of the students are of White British origin, but the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than in the local population. Three quarters of the students aged 16 to 18 are on advanced courses. For adult learners the proportions on advanced, intermediate and foundation level programmes are nearly evenly spread. The proportion of school pupils in Gosport who achieve 5 or more A\* to C grade passes at GCSE is well below the national average.

At the last inspection in November 2008 overall effectiveness was judged to be good. Capacity to improve and achievement and standards were found to be satisfactory, while the quality of provision and leadership and management were graded as good. Sport and travel, arts and media, and languages, literature and culture were all judged to be good. Health and care, and science and mathematics were found to be satisfactory. The college was asked to address the need to raise success rates in key skills, Level 2 and AS-level courses; investment in and use of information and learning technologies (ILT) to enhance learning; the consistency in implementation and monitoring of action plans at course level; the range of skills of the governing body and the financial position of the college. These areas for improvement are the focus of the monitoring visit

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

##### Question

What progress have managers and staff made in raising the capacity to make and sustain improvements from satisfactory to good?

Reasonable progress

It is clear that progress has been made in addressing the areas for improvement outlined in the last inspection report. Success rates have improved and outcomes for learners at AS, in Key Skills and on Level 2 programmes have improved. Investment in information and learning technologies (ILT) has taken place and is now more effectively embedded in teaching and learning. Action planning at curriculum level has improved and managers successfully support subject reviews. They closely monitor the action plans developed from identified key strengths and weaknesses. The college's financial position has improved, although the college is still projected to draw on its overdraft facility by the end of 2010. Learner numbers and funding are more stable following the abandonment of merger proposals. Vacancies in the governing body have been largely filled. One of the new governors has financial experience and the college has appointed a Vice Principal who is an accountant. The governors support and challenge college managers appropriately. In addition, the

college continues to develop its teaching and learning, to market itself effectively and to develop constructive local and regional partnerships.

### Outcomes for learners

#### Question

What progress has been made in improving students' achievements, in particular the need to raise success rates for key skills, Level 2 programmes and AS level? Reasonable progress

Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 have improved since the last inspection and were at or above national averages in 2009 for Level 1 and Level 2 programmes. On advanced courses, success rates have also improved but remain below national averages. For adult students, success rates at Level 2 improved in 2009 and were above the national average. However, at Level 1 and Level 3, success rates declined. Pass rates at Levels 1 and 2 for students aged 16 to 18 improved in 2009. However, the A\* to C grade pass rate for GCSE mathematics remains below the national average. AS pass rates have remained largely static and below national averages. However, the A-level pass rate has improved steadily for the past four years, in line with the national average for sixth form colleges. Outcomes for adult students improved at Level 2 in 2009 but declined at Levels 1 and 3.

Key Skills are now more fully embedded in curriculum programmes and many students are now completing 'Improve your Own Learning and Performance' through the tutorial programme. Success rates for Key Skills improved in 2009 and were broadly at national averages. However, information technology (IT) Key Skills success rates were low.

The progress of students, as measured through value-added indices, has improved over two years. Students on advanced courses make progress at or above that predicted from their prior attainment. Those students taking advanced and intermediate vocational programmes make progress above that predicted from their, often modest, prior attainment.

### Teaching and learning

#### Question

What progress has been made in investing in ILT to enhance learning? In addition, how is the college evaluating the use of ILT and any outcomes following investments? Reasonable progress

The college has continued to invest money and time in improving its ILT resources. Students report that the availability of computers and access to them are both good. Some 42 rooms are now equipped with data projectors but just 6 have interactive whiteboards. The new e-learning forum, a collaborative body made up of teachers,

technicians and managers, is exploring electronic learning opportunities in all its forms. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is well populated with learning materials from most subject areas, and students make frequent and good use of the VLE. Recorded usage has increased 28% in the autumn term of 2009 compared with the same period in 2008. The capabilities of the VLE as an interactive learning medium between students and teachers, and students and their peers, is not yet fully exploited.

## Leadership and management

### Question

What progress has been made in improving the consistency of action plans at course level? What strategies are in place to support managers and curriculum teams in areas of the college assessed as satisfactory? How are these strategies monitored and have improvements been made?

Reasonable  
progress

The recently appointed curriculum managers feel that lines of accountability and responsibility have become clearer following a management restructure. Course team leaders also now feel that they have more ownership of the performance of their staff and students. Course and curriculum reviews now follow a standard format, a consistent level of scrutiny and a common pattern of setting actions and targets against performance indicators. This process has led in 2008/09 to reviews that are reflective and searching. However, action planning and evaluation by curriculum leaders has yet to complete a full cycle, and so its overall impact on student outcomes remains to be seen.

Draft curriculum action plans for 2009/10 are ambitious yet realistic, and there are clear deadlines to meet the defined measures of success. Opportunities to have interim reviews of progress towards these targets do, however, need to be more clearly set out so that actions and plans are fully monitored. The college's internal quality review scheme and the use of exchange visits to other colleges to observe and discuss teaching techniques have all helped to improve outcomes for students in several curriculum areas.

### Question

Have vacancies in the governing body been filled and has this brought a wider set of skills to the Board? Does the Board now possess sufficient expertise to challenge and support senior managers?

Reasonable  
progress

New governors have been appointed to the corporation which is now very nearly up to full strength. Two new student governors and a new parent governor are in place. Of the external governors, there are four new members of the Board, three of whom will be ratified at the meeting on 10 December. The Board, as currently constituted,

has more expertise in finance and audit. The new governors have been effectively trained and inducted into their roles and responsibilities. Governors continue to work well and support the college and bring a good level of appropriate challenge to senior managers.

#### Question

What is the current financial position of the college and what is the position of any accommodation plans?

Reasonable  
progress

The college remains in a tight financial position but is much less precariously placed than it was at the time of the last inspection. The position in July 2009 was a deficit of £435,233. An overdraft of £506,000 was used to support operations until the end of July 2009, and the projected overdraft for the end of 2010 is planned to reduce to £319,000. The college's finances are now managed by a new member of staff appointed at Vice Principal level. This represents a more appropriate status for this role than hitherto. Among several newly recruited governors there is also now a member of the board who has extensive financial experience in the public sector as well as direct experience of internal audit work. This brings further financial expertise to the scrutiny of the college's fiscal affairs. The college's financial controls are robust and planned budget projections are cautious and watchful.

The college has reduced its staff costs considerably over the last two years, but these remain relatively high as a proportion of expenditure against income. The college has a ten-year estates and property plan that is realistic, prudent and takes account of the asset maintenance needs and essential health and safety imperatives of the current buildings and grounds.

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