

King Edward VI College, Nuneaton

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Sixth form college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

King Edward VI College is a sixth form college near the centre of Nuneaton. Almost all students are aged 16 to 18, mostly studying GCE AS and A level programmes. The college was last inspected in June 2008. All key aspects of provision; effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. One curriculum area was judged to be good and three were judged to be satisfactory. Since the last inspection, the college has appointed a new principal and vice-principal.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the college made in improving quality assurance, self-assessment and improvement planning?	Reasonable progress
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The 2008/09 self-assessment report (SAR) is currently in draft form. It is judged as realistic and broadly accurate in its evaluation of the college's work based on evidence scrutinised during the visit. Data on students' performance including from measures of added value are used widely to inform judgements. Strengths and areas for improvement are clearly identified. The SAR evaluates correctly that some of the evidence from lesson observations is insufficiently robust. Evaluation of this aspect rightly identifies the mismatch between the high grade profile from observations and some below average success rates. Detailed action points are in place to improve the rigour of the evidence base from observations. Use of evidence from stakeholder views in self-assessment has improved but the evidence base is insufficiently comprehensive in coverage.

At curriculum area level, self-assessment in 2008/09 has involved curriculum teams to a greater degree and the quality of the reports is more even. A few reports have insubstantial evidence to support judgements. Evaluation of value added data is limited. Generally, challenging targets are set at qualification level for retention, pass and success rates as well as for high grade achievement. In the best examples actions in improvement plans are sharply focused, including specific plans for underperforming individual subjects.

The new faculty leader roles have a clear mandate to implement quality assurance procedures fully and faculty leaders have made an energetic start to this development. Most processes are in place including an annual 'health check' on each faculty, close monitoring of progress reviews and regular and thorough data checks.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in improving students' outcomes?

Insufficient progress

Overall long course success rates at level 3 have remained the same for the last four years and continue to be below the national average in 2008/09. Overall retention at level 3 remains very slightly above the average, but overall pass rates have not improved, and remain below the average. The percentage of high grades is significantly below the national average.

Success rates at GCE AS level increased by one percentage point in 2008/09 and remains below the sector average. Retention has improved over the past three years. Pass rates have declined over the same period. The proportion of high grades has not increased in the past year and remains well below the sector average.

Success rates at GCE A level remained the same in 2008/09 and are in line with the sector average. However, the proportion of high grades declined in the last year, and remains well below sector averages. Students generally achieve no better than expected, given their prior levels of attainment. At sector subject area (SSA) level, the pattern of improvement in 2008/09, is similar to that recorded at the last inspection. Success rates improved in half of the SSAs but declined in the other half.

Success rates for level 2 provision have increased in the past year and are slightly above the average.

How much progress has been made in supporting teachers to develop teaching and learning strategies to meet the individual needs of students?

Reasonable progress

The college places a high emphasis on ensuring that teachers have easy access to a range of data about individual students and that these are used effectively to plan lessons and support students. Teachers are using initial assessment, including detailed information about prior attainment and assessment of learning styles, with increasing effectiveness. Lesson plans and schemes of work show where activities are tailored to meet individual needs, although effective implementation of these strategies is not yet consistent across all subjects. There are examples of good practice where teachers use extension activities well, to challenge students and stretch their knowledge. Students welcome the higher level of challenge provided by some teachers and enjoy these lessons, but a small minority of students expressed dissatisfaction, through a student survey in 2008/09, with the pace and stimulus provided in some lessons. These improvements are recent have yet to be fully embedded across the college's provision.

Leadership and management

How much progress has the college made in ensuring that arrangements for observing teaching and learning lead to

Insufficient progress

improved teaching?

At the last monitoring visit, the college had plans to extend the lesson observation scheme to cover all staff in 2008/09. These did not materialise and only half of the teachers were observed. The observations undertaken did not cover a representative sample and in several faculties, no observations took place. Where teachers were observed, action was taken to support those with identified development needs but with limited impact. The college's own evaluation of teaching and learning is that it is satisfactory, as it was in the last inspection.

In 2009/10, the observation scheme has been implemented much earlier, with renewed vigour and strong senior management leadership. A revised team of observers have undertaken a small number of observations. Observers have received training and are undertaking joint observations to standardise their judgements. They are gaining in confidence and being supported well; their judgements are broadly accurate although they do not always place sufficient weight on judging the progress that groups of students make in their learning during lessons. The recommendations for improvement following observations are often insufficiently explicit to be utilised fully in targeting individual development. Not enough emphasis is placed on ensuring that clear and relevant learning objectives are set in lesson plans. Observers make thorough evaluations of assessment of work to contribute to their judgements.

How much progress has the college made in ensuring that users' views inform quality improvements?

Reasonable progress

The college utilises an annual learner survey to gauge student views of the college. In 2008/09 the survey sampled nearly 52% of students and was analysed to inform action plans. There is considerable variability in the approach to canvassing learner views at curriculum level. Some areas utilise focus groups, regular feedback from lessons and surveys, but other areas do little. There are examples of changes to assessment methods and improved resources as a result of learner feedback. Students generally feel that the college is responsive to their needs. As an example, the college recently changed timetables to accommodate workshops as a result of strongly expressed student concerns. The college is aware of the need to develop an overarching user involvement strategy, to ensure that the various initiatives to engage learners, or canvass their views, fully inform its quality improvement arrangements.

The college has a student representative system, which ensures that student concerns are voiced adequately. A college forum made up of elected students meets regularly to discuss student concerns. However, student awareness of the forum is mixed. Students are appropriately represented on the governing body and on the equality and diversity committee. The college also involves students in the early stages of staff recruitment, including that of senior managers.

How much progress has the college made in improving its approach to equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, equality of opportunity was judged to be satisfactory. The success rates of some groups was identified as an area for improvement. Since then, the college has improved further the monitoring of the achievement of different groups. It has taken effective actions to redress identified underachievement. Success rates for Asian Indian students, a concern at the last inspection, have improved significantly to better than the college average in both 2007/08 and 2008/09. Learners in receipt of additional learning support now have higher pass rates than those not in receipt of support. Students from areas of higher deprivation and those in receipt of the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) achieve as well as or better than other students. However, over the past three years, the success rates of male students have been worse than those of female students, significantly so in both 2007/08 and 2008/09. The college has a good awareness of the achievement of different groups, and has devised specific Equality and diversity impact measures (EDIMS) to address underachievement. A recent example is the lower pass rate of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students in 2008/09, which has led to new arrangements for students in the current academic year. The college has an equality and diversity committee, which monitors outcomes satisfactorily.

The promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum has improved especially in relation to taking better account of the different abilities of students in the classroom. The college continues to celebrate diversity well.

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