

Hopwood Hall College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Hopwood Hall College is the tertiary college for the metropolitan borough of Rochdale. The college is located on two main sites, the Rochdale site in the town centre and the Middleton campus. The college provides mainly vocational programmes and offers provision in all 15 subject areas. Most full-time learners are aged 16 to 18; just over a third are studying at advanced level. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is 25%, which is more than double the proportion found in the local population. Rochdale is one of the most deprived boroughs in England.

At the last inspection in May 2007 the college was judged to be satisfactory overall. Its capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were all judged satisfactory. Equality of opportunity was judged to be good, as was overall effectiveness for learners aged 14 to 16. The overall effectiveness of its provision for work-based learning was judged to be inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
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The quality assurance system has become more embedded in the operational management of curriculum areas. The evidence base used to inform the self-assessment process has been expanded. There is stronger emphasis on the use of centrally produced management information and the analysis of trends. More weight is attached to feedback received from learners and employers. The validation of judgements has been enhanced through the introduction of panels that include senior leaders and independent curriculum managers. 'Special Measures Panels' are set up when under performance is identified. Specific targets for improvement within clearly defined timescales are set.

Reports are provided to senior managers and governors which focus closely on the quality of learning. The observation process is more robust and the number of observations has increased, although relatively few tutorials were observed last year. The moderation of the grading of learning sessions has been enhanced with more emphasis on the progress learners make, although some aspects of the reporting of progress lack clarity. Re-observation of sessions takes place not only where teaching and learning was judged to be inadequate but also when satisfactory.

Outcomes for learners

What do data for 2008/09 show about the progress made in improving pass rates at advanced level identified at the previous monitoring visit as having shown significant progress? Reasonable Progress

Since the last inspection pass rates at advanced level have improved substantially. In 2008/09 they improved to above the national average for adults. However, over the last three years pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds have remained around national averages. On most A-level and AS-level courses the proportions of learners achieving high grades remain low. However, college data show that learners' progress is generally in line with that expected, taking into account their prior attainment. A new sixth form college will open in Rochdale this year and Hopwood Hall has repositioned itself to be the local provider of vocational education and removed GCE A-level and AS-level programmes from its curriculum offer for September 2010. Learners aged 16 to 18 from minority ethnic backgrounds continue to perform well and attain high success rates when compared with national averages.

What progress has been made in improving the low retention rates identified in the self-assessment report of 2008/09? Reasonable Progress

A key area for improvement identified in the most recent college self-assessment report was the retention rate for adults on foundation level programmes. The rate was particularly low in 2008/09 and this had a significant impact on reducing the overall success rate in that year. The overall success rate in 2008/09 was below the college target although it was close to the national average, as it had been for the previous three years. The college has reviewed and improved its retention strategy in order to address this underperformance. Currently retention rates are better at all levels, most significantly so at foundation level where they are 13 percentage points higher. The overall attendance level has improved by 2 percentage points. College data show that it will meet its target for an overall retention rate of 87% and will make an improvement in overall success rates of around 5 percentage points in 2009/10.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning by using information and learning technology (ILT) more effectively? Reasonable Progress

The internal lesson observations this year show the better use of information learning technologies (ILT) to engage learners and enhance their enjoyment of lessons. The college appointed an e-learning manager in December 2009 to lead on the development of ILT and to support training for teachers. This has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The number of staff and learners using the college virtual learning environment (VLE) has doubled since the last

inspection and the amount of material available has greatly increased, although the proportion of interactive and distance learning material is relatively small. Staff and learners are enthusiastic about e-learning developments. In many learning sessions ILT successfully enhances the quality of learning. However, in a minority of lessons too great a reliance on a teacher-led approach results in a lack of challenge for learners of differing abilities.

What progress has been made in improving target setting for individual learners and the use of reviews to ensure learners reach their full potential? Reasonable Progress

The college has recently implemented an electronic system of target setting and monitoring learners' progress across all curriculum areas. This is having a beneficial impact in a number of ways. Tutors have been trained to set specific and realistic targets with learners. Learners find the system much improved as it gives easy access to records of attendance and progress in completing assignments. The frequency of individual tutorials has been increased to allow more regular monitoring of progress. There is better co-ordination of information between curriculum areas and support areas to ensure learners who are falling behind with work are identified early and supported appropriately. Records within curriculum areas show a positive impact on attendance and completion of assignments. The new system is being monitored by managers and this has identified the need for further training for some staff to ensure all learners benefit fully from the system.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the establishment and implementation of a learner involvement strategy? Significant Progress

The 2008 monitoring visit report noted that the college had established a learner involvement strategy but that it was at an early stage of implementation. The appointment of learning participation officers on each site has contributed significantly to the extent of learner involvement and its effectiveness. Class and course representatives speak highly of the opportunities to raise issues at curriculum or college level and give several examples of changes that have taken place as a result of their feedback. Learners are well represented in the formal college structures, including the governing body, the health and safety committee and the equality and diversity forum. They participate in self-assessment panels and meetings to discuss accommodation and resources. Learners welcome the opportunity to raise issues directly with senior managers at 'principal's question-time' and through on-line focus groups. An important element of the strategy is to train learners for roles of responsibility, enabling their involvement in key college processes, such as disciplinary hearings and acting as mentors for other learners. Further developments include a learner voice conference and the introduction of a student leadership team.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of management of work-based learning? Reasonable Progress

The college transformed and re-branded its business development unit into a new organisation called 'Orchard Training Solutions' in January 2009. A new management structure was put in place and key posts introduced, including the recruitment of a quality manager. In 2008/09 the overall and timely apprenticeship success rates improved significantly. However, for advanced apprentices rates fell. Advanced apprenticeship success rates are showing signs of improvement this year. The Train to Gain programme has grown very significantly; overall and timely success rates have improved and were high in comparison to national averages in 2008/09.

Employer engagement has improved and there is much more focus on using their views to help evaluate the quality of provision and ensure a demand-led approach to the curriculum offer. Employers speak very positively about the impact of Orchard Training on the quality of communication. There are several examples of employers influencing course content and delivery models. However, the range and depth of evidence used to assess and report upon employer satisfaction in other areas of the college work remains an area for improvement.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of accommodation and resources? Reasonable Progress

The college has devoted much time, effort and resource in producing a £72 million accommodation strategy. This strategy was designed to create high quality teaching and learning environments through the development of a new site in the town centre of Rochdale and an extensive refurbishment of the Middleton site. The promised funding for this development was withdrawn in 2009.

Despite this significant setback, the college has continued to make improvements to resources and accommodation. The strategic plan to provide excellent accommodation and resources will now take longer and be part of a staged process. There have already been substantial investments in ILT that have resulted in improved learning experiences for learners.

Sustainability has been given a high priority in the new accommodation plan. The college has closed its residential accommodation. The revised property strategy has required an extensive revision of financial planning. The most recent evaluation of financial management and control arrangements judges them to be good.

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