

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Havering Sixth Form

Date of visit: 05 February 2008

Context

Havering Sixth Form College is located on a single site in the London Borough of Havering, located between Hornchurch and Upminster. Havering has a very different economic profile to the London east area as a whole.

Employment is mainly in the wholesale and retail trade, public services and business services, with health and social work and hotels and restaurants key growth sectors. In the Indices of Deprivation 2004, Havering was ranked at 214 out of 354 local authorities in England. Havering is the least ethnically diverse borough in London, only 6% not being White British according to the Census 2001. The college, by recruiting outside the borough, is able to have a more significantly diverse student population, around 20%.

The college has a strong focus on level 3 courses, particularly advanced subsidiary levels (AS levels) and general certificate of education advanced levels (A-levels). The split between male and females students is approximately equal. The vast majority of learners are 16 – 18 years old. The College was last inspected in March 2005. Provision was judged to be good in two of the eight curriculum areas inspected and satisfactory in the other areas. There was no unsatisfactory provision. The college has rightly identified the poor state of much of its accommodation as a major barrier to further improving the quality of provision. As a consequence, an ambitious £54 million building project is at an advanced stage of planning.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made to improve students' achievements?	Reasonable progress
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The trend of improvement in students' achievements reported at the last monitoring visit has continued. The overall success rate for all courses in 2006/07 shows a 1% increase on the previous year, rising to 84%, which is above the national average for similar colleges. Success rates for learners on level 2 courses show a particularly large increase of 7% on the previous year, rising to 87% in 2006/07 which is significantly higher than is seen nationally.

The overall students' retention rate has improved at all levels. The overall achievement rate for 16 – 18 year olds has remained constant at 90% for the past three years and is just above the national average. However, for level 3 courses it fell by 1% between 2005/06 and 2006/07, mainly due to a slight dip in pass rates for some subjects with large numbers of students enrolled. All students belonging to Black and minority ethnic groups had higher success rates than nationally.

The college subscribes to the ALPS valued added system. The overall performance for AS and A-levels is satisfactory which indicates that students are achieving the results that might be predicted based on their previous performance. For 2007, subjects recording particularly improved and excellent value added scores included AS levels in archaeology, design and technology, business, English language, geography, government and politics, physical education and physics, A-levels in law and geology, and both AS and A-level history and mathematics. Poor and declining value added scores were particularly found in AS chemistry and English literature, and in AS and A-level theatre studies, economics, psychology and textiles. A number of applied AS and A-level subjects also scored poorly, including health and social care, travel and tourism, business and ICT.

Students' progress at GCE A level and in mathematics at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE)	Reasonable progress
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The last inspection reported that students' achievements were satisfactory overall, but "efforts to improve GCE A-level achievement have not been effective." Since then, the college has made reasonable progress and generally improved results each year. The overall success rate for AS levels is comparable to similar colleges nationally, although it has not increased over the previous three years. Overall A-level success rates increased by 2% from the previous year in 2006/07 and they are above the national average. High-grade pass marks for AS and A-levels have improved, but are still below the national average for similar colleges. The underperformance in AS psychology (with a success rate of 54%) was noted in the 2006/07 self assessment report and the subject is now part of the college's achievement review process.

The previous inspection report also noted that for GCSE mathematics "just 33% attain a higher grade pass". This pass rate has been somewhat erratic, rising to 53% in 2005/06, and then falling to 35% the next year. In 2006/07,

it increased considerably to 69%. This strong improvement is due to a number of actions taken by the college, including more emphasis being placed on preparing learners for the examination.

The proportion of students progressing to higher education (HE)	Reasonable progress
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The proportion of eligible learners progressing to higher education (HE) at the time of the previous inspection was low. The college has improved this figure steadily. For level 3 learners leaving the college in 2006/07, some 61% went on to HE and 28% entered full-time employment. The proportion of learners of minority ethnic heritage progressing to HE is above the college average. However, the proportion of male learners entering HE is lower than for females and the college is attempting to improve this situation.

The college encourages all learners to be fully aware of the progression opportunities available to them. Contact with university staff and students takes place through an HE day where universities exhibit at the college, speakers are invited to the college and visits are made to HE institutions. Formal agreements are in place with a number of universities, for example guaranteeing an interview to applicants. All advanced level students are sponsored for a commercial careers' questionnaire, to help them in their choice of HE course and future occupation. This is partly sponsored by the Aim Higher project and the information it provides is highly valued by the learners and staff interviewed. Careful monitoring continues to be taken for any second year A-level learners who have not applied to university, with appropriate action taken to ensure they are well informed of the opportunities available to them.

Quality of provision

The proportion of good and better teaching	Significant progress
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The proportion of lessons observed judged to be good or better during the previous inspection was below the national average for similar colleges. The principal and senior managers have placed a high priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning and significant progress has been made.

A team of external consultants have carried out a large number of lesson observations each year for the past two years. The findings from this work indicate that the proportion of good or outstanding lessons has improved from 67% in 2006/07 to 83% in 2007/08, with only 1% of lessons judged to be inadequate. Many of these observations were carried out jointly with college staff, providing useful training and development. In addition, non-graded lesson observations are carried out by managers to support teachers to improve their teaching. All teaching staff also participate in peer observations with colleagues.

A wide range of initiatives have also contributed to this improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. All staff attend three college conferences which offer training and development opportunities, and other activities include regular weekly sessions where a broad range of relevant pedagogic topics are covered. The college's six subject coaches work with course teams to improve aspects of teaching and learning and provide individual coaching for some teachers. Good progress has been made to improve success rates in some curriculum areas, such as sports and PE, through the sharing of good practice with staff from Beacon colleges.

The college has identified access to and the reliability of information and learning technologies (ILT) as an area for improvement. Teachers interviewed report a much higher profile in the college of ILT and a greater willingness among staff to use it regularly. The college's on-line learning environment, Moodle, is being used more frequently, specifically to encourage active and collaborative learning activities.

Leadership and management

The application of quality assurance processes	Significant progress
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The last inspection judged that "quality assurance and self-assessment are unsatisfactory". The college has made significant progress in the application of quality assurance processes. There is now a strong culture within the college of exploring ways to improve the quality of provision.

Under-performing courses are subjected to achievement reviews. These take place between senior managers and curriculum staff at three times during the year. They are highly valued by curriculum managers, as a way of focussing

attention on areas of weakness. Of the 33 courses that were subject to achievement review last year during the last academic year, 20 courses improved sufficiently to be removed from the review process. The achievement review process employs a wide range of initiatives. For example, sports and PE courses were under-performing and college staff were partnered with staff from a Beacon college to share good practice; this has led to an increase in success rates. The college is also forming alliances with other nearby sixth-form colleges to share good practice.

The self-assessment report (SAR) is self-critical and honest in its appraisal of strengths and weaknesses. The report is compiled through a process that involves all staff. The judgements made in subject SARs are clearly referenced to value added and students' achievement data. The report incorporates the views of students.

The use of value added data.	Significant progress
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The last inspection reported that "the use made of value added analysis in the assessment and monitoring process is unsatisfactory". The use of value added information is now embedded thoroughly in the college's processes for evaluating the quality of provision and the progress of individual students. It is also reported in the self assessment report for each subject where applicable and targets for further improvement in value added scores are given.

Value added information is used to set individual targets for learners. Progress towards these targets is monitored well. Every half-term, a report is sent to parents evaluating the current progress of students against their target grades, along with an account of their attendance and effort in lessons and when completing work outside college. These reports are highly valued by learners. Individual meetings between learners and tutors take place three times per year for a face-to-face progress review. Target grades remain unchanged throughout the year, regardless of a students' current performance. This can lead to the situation where a students' target grade is less than that given for their current performance, and so the target becomes insufficiently aspirational.