

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Date of visit: October 16 2007

Context

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual monitoring visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance. Birkenhead Sixth Form College was inspected in March 2005. 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 less than satisfactory. Science and maths were re-inspected at the Annual assessment visit in March 2007 and found to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What impact has the college achievement strategy had in improving students' outcomes?	Insufficient
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At the time of the monitoring visit results for the college 2006/07 had not been finalised as a number of the vocational qualifications were being remarked.

The achievement strategy was introduced in September 2006 as a revision of the Success strategy which had not brought about the anticipated improvements. The achievement strategy is well understood by staff but it is not clearly articulated in a written document. There is a strong focus on retention and achievement. The college sets clear targets for success rates at college, subject and individual member of staff level and for students. There is an emphasis on student Target Minimum Grades (TMG), staff and students are aware these are minimum grades. TMG are based on GCSE results and are not formally amended as a result of students' performance in college.

The Achievement strategy is supported by other policies including a behaviour policy and a resit policy. Both attendance and retention rates improved in 2006/07.

A number of task groups have been established to give staff greater involvement and contribution to the overall success of the college. Staff value this opportunity. The achievement strategy is supported by a task group which has made a number of amendments for 07/08 which are yet to be finalised and implemented.

Subject enhancement, in the form of additional lessons and workshops, is available for students who are failing to achieve their TMG, who self refer or are falling behind with course work. These sessions are now timetabled and are in addition to informal support which students receive from staff. The system is now well established and is well received by students. The impact of this on pass rates and VA is being monitored.

There is a detailed analysis of all results and action plans for improvement are in place for 2007/08, including a notice to improve for some subjects. Senior staff are closely involved with these improvements, but as yet the achievement strategy has had limited impact on overall college success. Success rates in 06/07 have improved at level 2 and 3. Success rates for level 1 are above National averages but declined from 05/06. At level 3, the majority of enrolments, success rates at 76% are still below national averages and college target for 06/07. Value added for A2 as calculated by ALPs is still below benchmark

Quality of provision

Has the improvement in science and maths provision identified at reinspection continued?	Reasonable
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The science department has been restructured. All subjects have been combined under the leadership of a head of science. Sharing of good practice has been extended. The level 3 offer has been reconsidered and the college now offers Applied Science and Use of Maths. The subjects meet the needs of students. Success rates on AS and A2 Biology have improved. Higher grade pass rates for A2 Maths have improved, but overall pass rates have not. Value added and pass rates in AS and A2 Chemistry are still low.

What measures have been taken to improve the uptake of support and what impact has this had on students?	Reasonable
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Systems for identifying students with support needs are good. The support team have good relationships with partner schools and aid the transition to college. The support team works with a number of local universities to which the students apply to assist students' transition to HE.

Additional support sessions are well attended. The college now analyses success of the students who attend additional support and value added has improved and is +3 points overall. For those students with Aspergers' syndrome VA is +10. The number of students with Aspergers' syndrome has increased and in 07/08 there are 23 students. The college has applied for Beacon status for this area of work.

What progress has been made in improving accommodation identified at the last AAV, and due for completion in September 2006?	Reasonable
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The refectory has been refurbished over the summer period. Classroom and common space are well maintained but some classrooms are too small for the number of students. Student social space is limited including the refectory. A feasibility study on a new build with increased space has been carried out and is supported in principle by the LLSC.

Leadership and management

How effective are the college's quality assurance systems in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning? How well is it addressing any pockets of inconsistent practice?	Reasonable
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The college continues to focus on improving teaching and learning. The proportion of good or better lessons is now 82%. This compares favourably with comparator data from three other sixth form colleges involved in a benchmarking project.

The observation of teaching and learning process has been reviewed; the system is thorough and rigorous. All observations are monitored and senior managers and a consultant carry out paired observations with departmental staff. The college is involved in peer referencing project with three other Sixth Form Colleges. Partners are involved in lesson observation, sharing good practice, benchmarking and validating self assessment.

The college is focussing on improving aspects of teaching and consistency of teaching and learning across the college. A good practice data base for teaching and learning has been developed and is available to staff through college intranet. This enables teachers to identify particular aspects of teaching such as questioning. Good practice is shared between departments. The college has developed minimum quality criteria for all subjects.

Departments and subjects areas which do not meet these criteria are issued with a "notice to improve". Senior managers then work with heads of subject to develop and implement an action plan for improvement. Actions and improvement are monitored by the senior management team.

The self assessment report now includes criteria for the protection of children and vulnerable adults developed in partnership with other colleges. The college uses proprietary software effectively to monitor progress with development plans. The rigour of monitoring has improved.