

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Hastings College

Date of visit: 14 January 2008

Context

Hastings is a medium-sized general further education college, serving Hastings and Rother. Hastings is one of the most deprived areas in the sub-region, with high levels of social and economic deprivation, low adult skills levels, and poor attainment by school pupils. The college sees itself as vital to raising the level of skills and employability in the area. In 2006/07, the college had close to 4,000 enrolments on long courses, with a fairly even split between students aged 16 to 18 and adult learners. The number of enrolments on part-time and short courses has fallen significantly, partly as a consequence of changes in national funding policy, but also as a consequence of a sensible rationalisation of the college curriculum. In 2007 the college opened a new specialist centre for sixth form provision, branded as 'Academy 6'. A major new build project is underway, and the college will re-locate to a site in the centre of Hastings in 2009.

Hastings College last had a full inspection in January 2003. At that inspection, leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. Both guidance and support, and educational and social inclusion, were judged to be good. Five curriculum areas were judged to be good, five satisfactory, and one unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory area was re-inspected in January 2005 and judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates, and in particular retention rates, on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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The college performance report for 2005/06 shows success rates on long courses for both students aged 16 to 18 and adult learners to be slightly below the national averages, by three percentage points and two percentage points respectively. Although success rates rose between 2003/04 and 2005/06, they did so in line with the rise in the national average, and produced a fairly constant position of success rates being slightly below the national average for both age groups.

College data for 2006/07 show an improvement in success rates by around seven percentage points to 72%, which is above the national average for 2005/06. Success

rates for students aged 16 to 18 remain slightly below the 2005/06 national average, at 68%. There has been a significant improvement in outcomes for this age group on courses at levels 1 and 3, but success rates at level 2 declined slightly in 2006/07 and are significantly below the national average. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 have not improved over the last three years, although the college is confident that data for 2007/08 will show a significant improvement because the proportion of students who were still on their courses at the time of the visit is significantly higher than at the same time a year ago.

Success rates for adult students have risen significantly, up from 64% in 2004/05 to 76% in 2006/07. This is mainly due to a significant increase in retention rates at all levels, and both retention and pass rates on level 1 courses.

Success rates have improved in most sector subject areas, and are good in several. However, in construction success rates remain significantly below the national average despite improvement. In leisure, travel and tourism success rates for students aged 16 to 18 have declined over the last three years.

In its analysis and interpretation of the data, the college sensibly bases its judgements on the assumption that national averages will have risen further by the time final data for 2007/08 are published.

What progress has been made in improving both overall and timely success rates in work-based learning?	Reasonable progress
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The management of work-based learning (WBL) has been strengthened, and success rates have improved. Staff in curriculum areas now meet frequently with the WBL manager to review progress against targets. Initial assessment is more rigorous and is now placing learners more accurately on appropriate courses. Learners' progress is more closely monitored through an individual profiling process overseen by the WBL manager. Key skills are now introduced earlier in the learners' programme. However, there are no clear milestones established for individual key skills completion. Off-the-job training sessions are subject to college observation, but there is limited observation of reviews or assessments. Employers are better briefed about apprenticeship structures, and college attendance is more closely monitored and reported to employers. In 2006/07, WBL overall success rates for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships were 42% and 10% respectively. Timely success rates were 27% and 4%. To the end of period 5 of 2007/08, there is a noticeable improvement in success rates. Overall success rates for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships have risen to 55% and 42% respectively, and timely success rates to 42% and 20% respectively.

Quality of provision

<p>What progress has been made in improving the quality of 'skills for life' provision, and improving the achievement of qualifications in literacy and numeracy?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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'Skills for life' provision has been considerably strengthened through an internal college re-structuring. A new manager is in place, and specialist subject co-ordinators now provide improved oversight of literacy, numeracy and English as a second or other language (ESOL) programmes. A new skills for life co-ordinator post affords a more effective quality improvement focus and an enhanced review of cross-college initial assessment. Provision has been reviewed and made more responsive to employer and community needs. For example, staff now operate to a 44-week year, improving employer-focused services and meeting year-round ESOL demand more effectively. Employer liaison has improved, with training needs analyses conducted, and delivering courses at employers' premises is well established.

Data management has been improved, with learners being enrolled on courses at the right level and of the right length. Achievement of qualifications has improved, with long course success rates for adults in 2006/07 at 85%, a 24% increase over 2005/06. Short course qualification success rates are currently 14% above national average. However, long course success rates for students aged 16 to 18 remain just under the national average. Poor performance in adult literacy qualifications has been investigated and measures put in place to prevent learners being inappropriately enrolled on literacy programmes.

ESOL and numeracy staff have appropriate specialist qualifications, or are expected to complete qualifications this year. However, staff in literacy are not able to gain specialist level 4 qualifications at present. Around 80% of sessional staff are trained to certificate in education or equivalent level.

<p>What progress has been made in improving the consistency of group tutorials and in embedding ECM themes into them?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Much work has been done to create a coherent tutorial framework that covers the *Every Child Matters* themes and ensures that individual learners' progress is carefully monitored. An external consultant has produced an overarching framework to achieve these aims, and training has been given. Tutorial staff commented that they were not involved in the development of the framework, although they are involved in a review of its implementation. The framework is clear and well-devised. There has been some confusion around the degree to which the framework and associated scheme of work has to be implemented in a rigid fashion, although there is now a

general recognition that tutorial practice should be adapted to meet the specific needs of different groups of students. Students interviewed during the visit enjoy tutorials. They find individual tutorials particularly helpful. Several commented that although group tutorials were often interesting, some tutors had a tendency to drift far away from the topic initially introduced.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving course reviews?	Reasonable progress
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Course reviews have improved, although in order to ensure that they now give a detailed account of each course they have become too burdensome and too lengthy. The reviews are based on a standard template and detailed instructions to course team leaders. Termly meetings to review each course are held, and the findings from these contribute to the annual course review. Course leaders are expected to report and evaluate in detail each course against the five key questions in the *Common Inspection Framework* and the *Every Child Matters* themes. In addition, they are expected to comment on recruitment patterns, and develop a detailed action plan to address areas for improvement. The average length of course reviews is around 20 pages. In the sample scrutinised during the visit there were many helpful and evaluative comments, but also too much description, a tendency on occasion to describe normal practice as a strength, and some repetition. Data are used well to report on key question one (achievement and standards). However, the reporting of strengths and areas for improvement under key question two (the quality of teaching and learning) and key question 5 (leadership and management) was frequently not sharply focused. In discussions with course team leaders, it was apparent that they find the process time consuming and do not fully recognise the benefits of such reviews as a tool for improvement rather than a management requirement. Although not scrutinised during this visit, there is evidence that sector subject area self-assessment reports are more concise and evaluative. The overall college self-assessment report provides a clear and self-critical overview of most aspects of the college's work.

What progress has been made in establishing Academy 6 and introducing a coherent 14-19 curriculum?	Reasonable progress
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The college's new sixth form centre, Academy 6, has made a promising start. In September 2007 31 students were recruited onto AS level courses, and there was a significant increase in enrolments on the International Baccalaureate programme of both international and local students. Currently there are 14 AS subjects running, with more anticipated for the next academic year. At the time of the visit, retention and attendance rates were high. Managers are working hard to establish an academic ethos and a culture of hard work in the Academy, although they recognise that there is still much to do to embed such a culture. Managers are acutely aware

that a significant factor in the success of the Academy will be students' examination results, and are working hard to ensure that the pass rates of the first cohort are high. They also recognise the need to make sure that the quality of teaching and learning, and teachers' understanding of the specific requirements of A/AS level examinations, are critical factors in ensuring the future viability of Academy 6. Marketing materials designed to promote the Academy throughout the area are of a very high standard.

The college remains heavily involved in the 14-19 strategy for the area. It is a partner in a specialist diploma in information and communications technology that is due to start in 2008, and is proposing to run several other diplomas in future years. However, the college has a concern that the new qualifications are not yet fully understood by many parents, teachers or pupils. College leaders continue to work hard to promote partnership working in the area. The college is leading on an innovative collaborative scheme to persuade the high proportion of young people not in education, employment or training, including teenage mothers, to take up opportunities at the college, although it is too early to assess the impact of these initiatives.