



Sixth Form College Commissioner Assessment of Gateway Sixth Form College: Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

1. A Sixth Form College Commissioner assessment of Gateway Sixth Form College was triggered by an inadequate Ofsted grading following inspection in October 2016. This is in line with the intervention policy for Sixth Form colleges outlined in [“Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills”](#). The purpose of the assessment is to assess the capacity of the current leadership and governance team to lead the college back to an Ofsted rating of good or better at the point of re-inspection, and to determine whether leadership or structural change is required.
2. Ofsted’s main findings were that:
 - managers have failed to sustain the previous good quality of provision: quality assurance arrangements are weak and do not lead to good outcomes for students
 - governance is ineffective; governors do not hold senior leaders to account
 - 16- to 18-year-old students make inadequate progress in vocational programmes and A levels because teachers do not challenge them to work hard to achieve the highest grades they can
 - a very low proportion of students who study functional skills or equivalent qualifications in English and mathematics and level 2 vocational programmes successfully complete their qualifications
 - teachers do not assess the progress of their students well enough and consequently they cannot adapt their lessons to give the right level of help to each individual
 - in too many lessons, students make insufficient progress due to the slow pace of teaching and learning and lack of challenging activities
 - managers do not have a clear view of the destinations of their students and do not know if they are being suitably prepared for employment and/or higher-level study
 - attendance and punctuality are too low and this disrupts learning
 - too few students, especially those on vocational programmes, participate in work experience or other work-related learning

Main findings of the assessment

3. The governing body lacks members with recent experience of leadership within an institution delivering 16 to 19 education and has not been able to provide sufficient challenge to the senior leadership team on declining performance and the quality of performance data. The introduction of a new data dashboard is designed to facilitate this, but requires further development.

4. The senior leadership team lacks capacity to lead urgent improvement. Improvements identified by the previous Ofsted inspection (January 2014) have not been addressed and ongoing difficulties with industrial relations remain an area for concern at the college.
5. The senior leadership team has not set a clear vision on how the culture of the college will need to change to effect the necessary improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and student progress.
6. The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team and middle managers are not clearly defined and accountability for the management of quality assurance is unclear.
7. Systems for assessing, tracking and challenging student progress were insufficiently robust prior to the Ofsted inspection and is not college-wide. In-year monitoring of student performance was also poor. A new 'mark book' system has recently (October 2016) been introduced but it is too early to assess its effectiveness and there are concerns about whether the approach to implementation within the college would lead to consistent practice
8. Performance management at all levels across the college is not sufficiently rigorous. Lesson observations have been inadequate, being announced in advance and infrequent. There is no direct link between lesson observation and performance management. The introduction of rigorous and robust quality assurance processes such as unannounced observations and regular learning walks are imperative if the college is to improve teaching learning and assessment within the college.
9. The college has seen sustained growth in student numbers in recent years, but this has had an adverse impact on the availability of space for students and subsequently their learning experience. Ofsted identified that attendance and punctuality were poor causing disruption to learning for all students and resulting *"....in many not developing the attitudes required of them to prepare for employment."*
10. Approaches to improving college performance set out in the Post-Inspection Action Plan are not sufficiently targeted on teaching, learning and assessment and student progress. It is not clear how the actions will be achieved and measured and accountability needs to be strengthened. Middle managers have not been actively involved in the development of the Post-Inspection Action Plan and as a result are not fully engaged in the implementation of actions.
11. At the time of my visit the process for the governing body to monitor the Post-Inspection Action Plan and the early impact of actions was not sufficiently robust. Governors need support in improving their skills to monitor delivery of the Post-Inspection Action Plan.
12. Industrial relations have been challenging and impacted on the senior leadership team's ability to drive quality improvement at the college.
13. The college has been well managed financially and is in a healthy position at present. The college's financial health status is assessed as 'outstanding' for the 2015 to 2016 academic year, and is judged as 'good' for the 2016 to 2017 academic year. The college has set aside a small budget to support improvement activities.

Recommendations

1. The college should stand aside from implementing structural change within the context of the area review and focus exclusively on improving quality standards with the aim to achieve an improved inspection rating at the next full inspection (expected by February 2018).
2. The Post-Inspection Action Plan should be re-written by no later than 31st January 2017 to focus on the themes and actions which will have most impact on improving teaching, learning and assessment and student progress and outcomes. It should clearly articulate how the actions will be achieved, measured and which individuals will be accountable for delivery, implementation and progress. It should also identify external sources of support; the EFA should assist in identifying these.
3. The college should engage its staff in how it will approach implementation of the Post-Inspection Action Plan.
4. There should be a dedicated committee of the governing body which has the sole task of overseeing implementation of the Post-Inspection Action Plan. This should be established by 31st January 2017.
5. The governing body should review the frequency and arrangements with which it and/or its committees monitor implementation of the actions in the Post-Inspection Action Plan and their early impact in order to ensure that effective oversight of progress and challenge is rigorous.
6. Governors and the senior leadership team should set out its high level vision for how the culture of the college will change.
7. The senior leadership team should be strengthened to ensure that it has the required capability to lead urgent improvement and drive change across the college.
8. The governing body should recruit members with current or recent educational management experience in high performing Further Education institutions. The EFA should assist in identifying potential members.
9. The Chair of Governors and Chair of Quality and Standards should twin with peers in other colleges which are either high performing or have a track record of rapid improvement.
10. The college should review the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team, Directors of Studies and Programme Area Managers in order to ensure clear accountabilities for the management of quality assurance, especially for teaching, learning and assessment and for student progress.
11. The governing body should strengthen the process of regular performance management of senior leadership team members and that this should be replicated at all levels in the college.
12. The college should urgently implement a college-wide system for assessment, tracking and monitoring of student progress.
13. The EFA should attend governing body meetings and potentially committees in an observer status until it is satisfied that there is sufficient oversight and challenge of the Post-Inspection Action Plan or until the college achieves an improved inspection rating.

Peter Mucklow

Sixth Form College Commissioner

December 2016