

Barnet and Southgate College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Barnet and Southgate College was created on 1 November 2011 through the merger of the two general further education colleges of Barnet and Southgate. The merger created one of London's largest multi-site further education colleges, with five campuses across the boroughs of Barnet and Enfield. The college offers vocational and non-vocational courses from entry level to higher education in all 15 subject areas. In 2010/11, over 10,500 learners studied at Barnet College and 5,500 at Southgate College. About half the learners at Southgate College, and just over half at Barnet, were adults. Over the two former colleges, more than 2,400 learners were on Train to Gain programmes and around 120 learners were on apprenticeships in 2010/11, mainly at the former Barnet College.

Both colleges were inspected in the autumn of 2009. Inspectors judged Barnet College to be good for all key aspects of the college's work and its overall effectiveness, and Southgate College to be satisfactory for all aspects. The new college has a mission of 'providing high quality education and training for economic and social well being'. This report focuses on themes explored during this monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in ensuring the rigour of self-assessment across the new college, and that it provides accurate evaluation and planning at course level and involves learners in evaluating the quality of provision? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspections, both former colleges made good progress in improving the rigour of self-assessment up to the merger. Senior managers are now making appropriate changes to the processes which provide the new merged college with a sound basis for an effective, evaluative system with a good focus on course planning. However, that work has yet to be fully completed and its impact is not yet clear.

Both former colleges have improved the availability and effective use of data, particularly at course level. They have increased the rigour of self-assessment through the increased use of external review. Good practice from both colleges, and from wider sources, is being used well to shape the systems of the new college. The involvement of students and other users in self-assessment is much improved and students recognise that their contributions are now valued and do make a difference.

Course reviews are detailed with satisfactory improvement plans, but their complexity often hides the key improvements that are required to raise the quality of provision for learners; the college recognises this and is changing the format of reviews. The single quality improvement plan is not fully derived from the two

separate self-assessment reports, but reasonably and effectively focuses on new priorities for the merged college.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made to improve success rates for learners on long courses and apprenticeship programmes? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress overall since the previous inspections in raising success rates on long courses and apprenticeship programmes. Both former colleges showed an improvement in overall success rates in 2010/11.

At Barnet College, overall long course success rates for both age groups improved by around five percentage points since the last inspection. However, although success rates for adults rose to the national average, those for learners aged 16 to 18 did not reach the 2010/11 national average. At foundation level, success rates rose significantly in 2010/11, but after a decline the previous year. However, at intermediate and advanced levels, success rates increased over each of the last two years to around the national averages. Success rates in nearly all subject areas improved, with around half rising to above national averages, although about half remained below. Although retention rates increased by around four percentage points over the last two years to just above average, the improvement in achievement rates was less and they remain below average. Success rates overall for the small apprenticeship programme were low, due mainly to an employer going into liquidation.

At Southgate College, overall long course success rates also improved, by nearly seven percentage points in 2010/11, but just over two points since the last inspection, to meet the national average. Success rates at foundation level rose by over six percentage points from the previous year, but by about one point over two years. There was a good increase to above average at intermediate level for both age groups in 2010/11, after a drop the previous year. At advanced level, although the success rates for the smaller proportion of adult learners consistently improved over two years to above national averages, those for students aged 16 to 18 declined to below average, primarily due to a significant decline in students' achievements at AS level. Retention rates improved to just above national averages and for both age groups. Achievement rates improved slightly since the last inspection, but are still below average due to the lower performance of 16 to 18 year-old learners. Although the college increased the number of work-based learners in 2010/11, the provision remained small. However, the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications, and by their planned end dates, increased significantly from below national averages to above.

What progress has been made in improving learners' attendance and punctuality?

Reasonable progress

After the previous inspections, managers of both former colleges increased the focus of staff on recording, monitoring and improving students' attendance and punctuality. At the Barnet sites they introduced an effective electronic swipe-card system to record students' attendance and punctuality accurately using college identification cards. At both former colleges, students' attendance patterns, and any actions taken when necessary, are now recorded on their electronic individual learning plans. Accurate data on attendance and punctuality are available to managers earlier.

Through effective performance-rated reports, teachers, tutors and managers gain early warnings of students and courses that are at risk of underperforming due to poor attendance, and take swift and appropriate actions to prevent further decline. For example, this may include automatic texts or postcards sent to the students. Attendance rates have improved in both colleges each year from relatively low baselines at the time of the previous inspections; college data indicate a further improvement in the current year. However, managers agree that rates are not yet high enough. The college does not yet have evidence of much improvement in students' punctuality to the beginning of lessons.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in ensuring that lessons are planned more effectively to take into account the individual needs of all learners, including the better use of information and learning technologies (ILT)?

Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the effectiveness of lesson planning. Although lesson plans vary in format between courses, they allow an appropriate degree of flexibility, and the contents are routinely reviewed. They are now more detailed, and are generally logical, showing a considered approach to providing students with a variety of appropriate learning activities. In lessons observed by inspectors, teachers followed their plans well, allowing flexibility when necessary. Targeted additional learning support is extensive. However, too few teachers pay sufficient attention to planning lesson activities and materials to suit the often wide range of abilities of students in the group.

Teachers now plan and use ILT better in lessons, in a few cases very imaginatively and effectively, but in most cases satisfactorily. The new Wood Street site is particularly well equipped to support this. Although the college has improved the facilities on other sites, some enhancements, for example for improved computer speed, are still required. The college is currently rectifying these problems. The virtual learning environment, a relatively new venture at the previous inspection, is now a useful part of student routine, mainly for lesson reinforcement but in some instances to help students extend their knowledge and understanding.

Leadership and management

How well has the college improved links with employers to extend work-based opportunities for learners, and to ensure rigorous quality assurance procedures with subcontracted provision?

Significant progress

The college has doubled the number of links with training-based employers since the previous inspections. It has increased the number of apprentices significantly to around 900, based in more subject areas than before. The college has developed a highly successful programme with Jobcentre Plus resulting in high levels of employment. The new enterprise and employment zone within the college includes Jobcentre Plus presence and a successful Job Shop which advertises local employment and volunteering opportunities and supports learners well to achieve them. The college is currently negotiating a large number of multi-vocational training opportunities with a high profile rugby club that is moving to the area.

After the previous inspections, the colleges improved the coordination of work-based learning and it is now the responsibility of a single team. Managers have developed rigorous procedures and systems to ensure the robust quality assurance of subcontractors and employers of apprentices. They use detailed surveys and pay regular audit visits to monitor performance and continued compliance, and review progress of improvements where necessary. The new department responsible for coordinating work experience has been successful in providing vocation-related experience, voluntary work or part-time jobs, including within the college during enrolment periods, for the large majority of students.

How much progress has been made in targeting professional development and sharing good practice across the college to improve teaching and learning?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in providing relevant and wide-ranging staff development since the previous inspections. This has impacted positively on staff performance, contributing to recent improvements in success rates, and in the quality of provision identified in lesson observations. Training requirements are identified accurately through observations of teaching and learning, performance appraisal and through effective professional development advisers.

The college has increased the number of specialist learning coaches and advisers significantly. It has introduced a professional development centre with a remit to develop initiatives to raise the quality of teaching and learning to outstanding. Online resources to support professional development have been significantly enhanced. A very wide range of projects, linked to internal and external initiatives on teaching and learning, with a particular focus on ILT, has led to improvements in the quality of lessons. Sharing of good practice is covered very well between areas of the expanded college, and through using external resources. This is enhanced through increased use of peer observations, and providing good support for teachers

performing at standards deemed less than good. Where self-assessment has identified weaknesses in courses or subjects, intervention teams effectively aid improvements.

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