

Knowsley Community College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130486

Name of lead inspector: Josephine Nowacki HMI

Last day of inspection: 10 February 2012

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. Knowsley Community College is a general further education college that was formed in 1990 from the merger of Kirkby College of Further Education, Knowsley Central Tertiary College and the sixth forms of Kirkby schools. The college operates from two major centres in Roby and Kirkby. In addition to courses on the college sites, part-time courses for adults are offered in community centres and employers premises. The college offers provision in all subject areas except agriculture, horticulture and animal care. The range of courses extends from pre-entry through to higher education. The college has large contracts to provide apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the workplace. As part of the 'Knowsley Collegiate', the college offers courses for pupils aged 14 to 16.
2. The majority of students come from the Knowsley area with a high proportion of the remainder coming from Liverpool. Most students are from a White British heritage and this reflects the local population. Knowsley is one of the most deprived areas in the country. Levels of unemployment, especially among the youth, are higher than regional and national averages. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is high. The number of people claiming incapacity benefit or severe disability allowance is much higher than the national rate. The level of skills and qualifications in the area is below the national average. In 2010/11, the proportion of school leavers gaining five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics was low.
3. In 2010/11, 4,887 students were enrolled at the college. The majority of the 2,363 students aged 16 to 18 were enrolled on full-time courses. Most adults follow part-time courses.
4. In the last year the previous Principal retired. A new Principal has been in post since September 2011.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (family learning)
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Prospects/Geason (customer service)
 - Silver Track Training (rail engineering)
 - Training Strategies Ltd (security and engineering)
 - TTE Ltd (engineering/performing engineering operations)
 - Horizon Training (engineering)
 - 3As Group (information technology/property services)
 - Platinum H&SC Training (health and social care)

- Progress Sports ('Employment Awareness in Active Leisure and Learning', sports and sports leadership)
- Liverpool Media Academy (music, media and performing arts)
- Elliott Clarke (performing arts)
- Premier Sports ('Employment Awareness in Active Leisure and Learning', sport, sports leadership and school sport)
- Develop U (engineering)
- SB Training (vehicle maintenance)
- Knowsley Skills Academy (army preparation)
- Hugh Baird College (skills support for the unemployed and redundant)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Further education (16 to 18) Foundation learning	602 part-time learners 1,570 full-time learners 222 part-time learners 397 full-time learners 174 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	820 full-time learners 1,133 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	1,329 learners 904 apprentices
Informal adult learning	806 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 4
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for students	4
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Visual, performing arts and media	3
Literacy and numeracy	4
Business, administration and law	4

Overall effectiveness

- Knowsley Community College has a number of strengths but is not currently providing a satisfactory standard of education and training. The college has strong partnerships with employers that enable the college to offer growing opportunities for training and apprenticeships. Close collaboration with the local authority has resulted in effective community provision, successfully attracting unemployed adults and young people back into education. Well established relationships with the NHS and other agencies enable college staff to provide wide-ranging pastoral support to those students who face many barriers to learning and success; students value this highly. Students say, and inspectors agree, that the college provides a very safe and welcoming place to study.
- The college is emerging from a period of significant change. It has recovered well from a weak financial situation and its finances are now secure. In the past year, around 20% of staff left the college and the previous Principal and many senior managers also left. A new Principal took up post in September 2011, and

a newly restructured senior management team is now in place. The new team recognises the challenges the college faces and that much needs to be done to achieve its ambition to be outstanding. Although achievement, especially for students aged 16 to 18 has improved in 2010/11, not enough students are staying on their courses, achieving their qualifications and doing as well as they can. Low attendance and poor punctuality are factors that have gone unchecked in too many lessons and are preventing significant numbers of students from succeeding as well as they could. Another obstacle in the way of the college achieving its ambition is too much inconsistency in the quality of its provision and a large amount of teaching that is only satisfactory. Teachers' expectations of students are often too low. Arrangements for quality assurance have not been sufficiently effective to drive improvement quickly enough, and targets for the college as a whole are often unchallenging.

Main findings

- Outcomes for students have been low since the previous inspection. Despite a trend of improvement in the long course success rate in 2010/11, it remains just below the national average for students aged 16 to 18 and consistently well below the national figure for adults. Low attendance and poor punctuality are key factors in inhibiting the progress made by a significant number of students.
- Success rates have improved in many subject areas. They are above average in two areas but low in most others. Results in engineering, information and communication technology, and business declined significantly in 2010/11 and are very low. Two out of the four subject areas inspected were judged inadequate.
- Students make satisfactory progress at college. Value-added data indicate that most students who reach the end of their advanced-level courses make the progress expected of them. Inspection evidence confirms this. Given their starting points, many students make good progress in their personal and social development.
- On programmes for employed learners, success rates are low but improving for apprentices. On NVQs in the workplace, the proportion of learners completing within the planned time has risen and is satisfactory.
- The quality of teaching and learning varies significantly, but too much is satisfactory and not enough is of the highest quality. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons that are linked to the workplace and prepare students well for examinations. Teachers do not always make effective use of the outcomes of the initial assessment of students' levels of literacy and numeracy to plan learning activities that meet the individual needs of students.
- Employers speak positively about the college's flexibility in arranging training and assessment for their employees. Assessment on college-based courses is satisfactory. In many subjects, students' progress against their targets is not monitored with sufficient rigour. Students do not always receive sufficient feedback on their written work to help them improve it and reach their targets.

Teachers' use of question and answer techniques to check learning is inconsistent.

- The college offer incorporates a wide variety of programmes in community settings, the workplace and a variety of venues across the borough and the college's centres. The progression of students between levels of courses is satisfactory and it is low between AS- and A-level courses. Students take an active role in suggesting, planning and evaluating enrichment activities. The result is an interesting and diverse programme of college enrichment. Work placement opportunities are insufficient.
- The college has forged good collaborative partnerships with employers, the local authority and schools. Staff are very closely involved in local regeneration initiatives and have developed courses that are successfully attracting adults, including those who are unemployed and young people back into education. Students benefit greatly from the college's well established links with the NHS, welfare and other support agencies.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The use of pre-enrolment support plans for many students who face significant barriers to learning is underdeveloped. Staff are highly committed to their students and students value the extensive pastoral support. Guidance is satisfactory; many full-time students are directed onto vocational programmes where the level of technical skills required is insufficiently challenging.
- Students' progress reviews are satisfactory. Personal tutors evaluate key aspects of students' progress and student advisors provide additional support for those students not progressing satisfactorily. However, targets set for students are unambitious, imprecise and difficult to monitor. Too little attention is given to the need to attend and be punctual.
- Despite some improvements in the last year, quality assurance arrangements have not been robust enough to drive improvements sufficiently quickly in all areas. Data are analysed well in some areas and not in others. Self-assessment is not always incisive and not all targets are sufficiently challenging. The system for the observation of teaching and learning is overly bureaucratic and insufficiently rigorous in identifying what teachers need to do to improve.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are good. The college provides an inclusive and welcoming environment for students, staff and visitors. Health and safety are given a high priority and students develop safe working practices. Students say they feel very safe in and around the college's sites.

What does Knowsley Community College need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards, particularly in underperforming courses so that students have a good chance of success. Set higher expectations for students' punctuality and attendance at lessons and ensure that all staff implement college procedures rigorously.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers have access to information on the levels of all students' attainment in literacy and numeracy. Provide training so that teachers are able to use this to plan learning activities that meet the needs of all students and provide sufficient challenge so that they all make good or better progress.
- Identify and share good practice in assessment techniques. Ensure that all teachers are able to use directed questions that challenge and check students' learning. Improve teachers' assessment of students' written work. Make sure that students' progress reviews contain sufficiently challenging targets that are specific and measurable.
- Review the arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of lesson planning and for observing lessons. Set higher expectations for the standards of teaching and learning. Simplify arrangements for observing lessons and ensure all teachers have clear actions for improvement from observations.
- Improve and extend the current initial assessment process to ensure that students' personal and additional support needs are formalised as soon as they start their courses. Review current guidance to ensure that students are enrolled on courses that provide sufficient challenge in developing their technical skills.
- Improve the rigour and accuracy of self-assessment and quality assurance processes. Strive for a greater degree of critical insight when evaluating performance. Analyse data more thoroughly. Set more ambitious targets and higher expectations for staff at all levels of the college to ensure that all students achieve their aspirations. Monitor progress against these targets assiduously so that the college achieves its objectives.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the friendly, helpful teachers and the great atmosphere
- feeling really safe
- the food in the canteen and the free breakfasts
- being treated like adults
- being listened to and the prompt action taken in response to learner surveys
- the extent staff go to in providing individual support, including the invaluable support from trainer-assessors to help keep up with their work
- the good links between theory lessons at college and practice at work
- the good resources including the virtual learning environment and the gym.

What students would like to see improved:

- the social spaces, including common rooms
- the timing of assignments

- the cost of visits and the high cost of food in the canteen
- the availability of advanced-level courses for adults in the community
- the insufficient amount of challenging work for A-level students
- the insufficient number of books in the library
- more university visits and visiting speakers from higher education institutions.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the flexibility of the college in meeting their training needs
- the trainers and assessors who work well with employees and apprentices
- the open communication between them and college staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the opportunity to be more involved in course design and self-assessment.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Overall success rates improved in 2010/11, especially for students aged 16 to 18. The recently appointed Principal is aware that results remain low for too many students and is unequivocal in his drive to raise standards. His vision is clear and ambitious. A recent and significant restructure means that nearly all managers at senior level are new to their roles. All have an understanding of the challenges the college faces and welcome the Principal's supportive and motivational leadership style.
10. Appropriate actions are being taken to remedy existing weaknesses. For example, college data indicate that more students are staying on their courses than at a similar time last year. Low attendance is also being tackled, but with less success. Quality assurance arrangements are inclusive, but managers are aware they are not driving improvement sufficiently quickly in all areas of the college and are taking actions to remedy this, for example, the system for the observation of teaching and learning is under review. The college's financial position declined in the period since the previous inspection but this has been remedied and the college is now financially sound and able to support further development of the facilities and accommodation. The governors, managers and staff demonstrate a commitment to improve the college.

Outcomes for students

Grade 4

11. Students' achievements on long courses have been consistently low since the previous inspection, but they improved in 2010/11. However, success rates on long courses remain below the national average, and the improvement masks significant disparities between ages of students, levels, qualifications and subject areas. On college-based short courses the success rate declined in 2010/11 and was very low.
12. In two of the areas inspected, outcomes for students are satisfactory. In the other two areas, literacy and numeracy, and business, administration and law, students' outcomes are inadequate. Inconsistencies in the performance within and between different subject areas at department level reflect the overall performance of the college. While results in nine subject areas have improved, most remain below average, some significantly so. Results in four of the fourteen subject areas have declined and are very low.
13. Although the performance of students aged 16 to 18 has improved notably, it remains the case that too many students are not achieving their qualifications, especially at foundation level. For adults on advanced-level courses success rates were satisfactory in 2010/11. However, for significant numbers of adults, there has been insufficient improvement; at foundation level success rates are low and at intermediate level they are very low. School pupils aged 14 to 16 achieve satisfactorily.

14. The performance of students who study AS-and A-levels is unsatisfactory. At AS, achievement is high in a few subjects including English literature and history. However, too many students taking AS courses do not achieve their qualifications and too few students progress onto A-level courses. At A-level, where learner numbers are small, success rates are high in most subjects, but the proportion of students gaining high grades is very low in too many subjects. For students aged 16 to 18, A-level results are unacceptably low. For the small number of adults taking A-levels, results are good. Performance is better on advanced-vocational courses, where success rates are above average for adults and around average for younger students.
15. Since the previous inspection, retention has declined and was low in 2010/11. In the current year, a range of initiatives is having a positive impact; college data indicate that the number of students who stay on their courses has increased compared to a similar period last year.
16. Success rates in key skills qualifications have been consistently low although they improved in 2009/10. Rates were very low in functional skills in 2010/11. Actions have been taken to remedy this but it is too soon to assess whether these are successful. Results in GCSE English are high and in mathematics they are low.
17. On work-based courses, the overall success rate for apprentices has improved but remains low. The success rate for advanced apprentices is low. For learners completing within the planned time on NVQs in the workplace, success rates are satisfactory.
18. The college has narrowed the gap in performance between males and females on college-based courses. On apprenticeship programmes, males do better than females, whose performance is declining. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those in receipt of additional learning support and students from the most deprived backgrounds are more successful than others in the college.
19. Most students on advanced-level programmes make the progress expected in comparison with their starting points. Most students on foundation and intermediate programmes make satisfactory progress although the variation between subjects is wide. In most areas of the college, students make good progress in their personal development, confidence and self-esteem.
20. Arrangements to promote students' economic and social well-being are inadequate. The college has good arrangements to promote students' social well-being through effective personal and specialist support services. Inadequate provision in literacy and numeracy has a negative impact on students' economic well-being, as does their low attendance and poor punctuality.

21. Students really enjoy their time in college and report that they feel very safe. Entry to buildings for students and visitors is controlled carefully and security arrangements enable students to access college facilities safely both during the day and in the evening. Students have a good awareness of what constitutes and contributes to their health and well-being and take good advantage of the many health services offered in the college.
22. Students' engagement with the local and wider community is good. Many take part in volunteering opportunities, arts and community and national projects. Students really enjoy contributing to the 'KCC Live' radio station. Sports students run injury clinics and local sports events in primary schools, community and other sport venues.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

23. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified and they benefit from a wide range of professional development activity. Despite this, the quality of teaching and learning varies significantly across the college and within subject areas. Only a small proportion of the lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be of the highest quality and too many were satisfactory.
24. In the better lessons, teachers plan their sessions carefully to include a range of activities that develop students' knowledge and skills sequentially. They use their very good knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects to make lessons relevant and motivating by linking their lessons to what happens in the workplace. Pace is managed very well, ensuring that students of all abilities are involved actively throughout the lesson.
25. The most effective teachers use a range of learning materials, including information and learning technology (ILT), effectively. In an A-level physical education lesson, the teacher made good use of ILT to link video clips of athletes to interesting and interactive learning materials which made the topic relevant and enjoyable for the students. In hairdressing and beauty therapy and in engineering theory lessons, teachers make good use of ILT to reinforce students' learning. However, in too many lessons teachers do not exploit fully the modern learning technology available to challenge and motivate students.
26. Where teachers' planning and delivery of lessons is weaker, the aims and objectives are vague, and students are unclear of what they have to do. Activities do not provide sufficient stretch and challenge, teachers' expectations of the students are low and the pace of the lesson is slow. In these lessons, the use of questioning to check students' understanding is insufficient. In too many of the lessons observed by inspectors, teachers have not taken appropriate action to ensure that their students attend regularly and that they adopt positive attitudes to learning by arriving punctually.

27. The arrangements for carrying out the initial assessment of students' levels of literacy and numeracy are not sufficiently well planned to ensure that all of those who need additional support are identified and supported promptly. As a consequence, some additional support sessions, such as for students on AS- and A-level courses, are not arranged soon enough. Teachers do not make sufficient use of the outcomes of literacy and numeracy assessments where these are available to plan learning activities that meet the varying needs of students.
28. Assessment of students' progress and the feedback they receive on their work vary significantly and are unsatisfactory in some aspects. In the best examples, students are set aspirational learning targets and their progress against these is reviewed regularly. In weaker areas, teachers do not make effective use of target setting processes to help students to understand what they need to do to improve and to monitor their progress. Targets are often insufficiently challenging. Work is often marked promptly but teachers do not always indicate what students have to do to improve. Internal verification of assignments and assessments decisions is carried out appropriately in most areas. On work-based programmes teachers plan training that helps apprentices to gather the correct evidence for their portfolios. They use a variety of assessment techniques and have recently introduced more robust processes for monitoring apprentices' progress using an online system.
29. Managers have rightly identified that the college's arrangements for quality assuring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not been sufficiently effective in raising standards, particularly of those teachers who underperform. New managers have a good grasp of the areas that need to be improved and are in the early stages of implementing a new teaching and learning strategy. Observers carrying out joint observations with inspectors accurately identified the key characteristics of the lessons in most instances. However, the current standards for teaching and learning that observers use to make judgements about teachers' performance do not set high enough expectations, particularly in areas such as students' attendance and for planning lessons. Arrangements for observing lessons are overly bureaucratic and do not provide sufficient support for observers in analysing and evaluating the progress of students. The outcomes from observations are not always precise enough to help teachers to take responsibility for improving their performance.
30. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is satisfactory. Full- and part-time programmes from entry level through to foundation degrees are offered in community settings, the workplace and college centres. Where possible, managers plan timetables to accommodate students' individual needs. However, progression between levels of courses is low, including for school pupils aged 14 to 16. In response to local initiatives, the college has developed a well considered range of short vocational programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training. A suite of 'welcome to learn' programmes is successful in attracting adults back into education.

31. Students benefit from a diverse range of cross-college and curriculum enrichment activities that enhance their skills and knowledge and provide enjoyable opportunities for social interaction. In engineering, full-time students have good opportunities to gain experience in employers' setting during the time that apprentices are attending training at college. However, the number of work-placement opportunities is insufficient for most students on vocational courses.
32. Partnership working is strong. Through its work with local schools, college staff have set up Young Apprenticeship programmes in engineering and construction and these have been very successful in improving pupils' behaviour and attainment in school. Working with the NHS the college has established a nurse cadet scheme that is replicated across the North West as good practice. The college uses its extensive links with the voluntary sector and support agencies very effectively to support students with personal issues, provide advice and guidance, and for specialist help.
33. Arrangements to guide and support students are satisfactory. Well established procedures facilitate a seamless transition for vulnerable and 'at risk' students, and for those transferring from special schools, into college. Procedures for other students are less effective because they often result in a delay in providing appropriate support. However, as soon as a need is identified, students benefit from strong personal and welfare support provided by pastoral and curriculum staff or through referral to external agencies. Data indicate that students in receipt of additional support stay on their courses and succeed better than their peers. Initial advice for students is satisfactory. Current recruitment policies direct many full-time students too readily onto vocational programmes where the level of technical skill development is insufficiently challenging.
34. A structured cross-college group tutorial programme is in place for full-time students providing a good range of information, guest speakers, college-wide competitions and topics that instigate lively discussions. Individual tutorials evaluate key aspects of each student's progress including punctuality and attendance, but these are insufficiently rigorous to effect improvement. Parents and carers value the support and care provided by the college staff for their offspring and feel that they are kept well informed of their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

35. Since joining the college in September 2011, the Principal has communicated clearly his ambitious vision. He, supported by his senior leaders, is aware of the challenges the college faces, but is unequivocal in his determination to raise standards. However, the ambition articulated by the Principal and others is not yet fully reflected at all levels of management or in all areas of the college where, too often, a culture of low aspiration exists.

36. The college plays a pivotal role in the local community and its provision is an important resource for local people. Buildings and other facilities are of good quality and there are plans to develop these further to ensure the college meets the education and training needs of local residents and employers. The college offers a very safe and welcoming place to study and students value this highly.
37. The governors are highly supportive of the college and are proud of its role in the community it serves. Governors fulfil their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding, health and safety, and equality and diversity. They have a thorough understanding of the local region and are ambitious for the college and of the role it plays in regenerating the area. Governors have a good range of expertise and backgrounds and have used this well to help steer the college through recent turbulent times, especially financial difficulties. However, their expertise has been used less effectively in the interrogation and challenge of the college's performance.
38. Although improved, too many students do not achieve their qualifications. In many areas of the college, aspirations for students are too low. Success rates on long courses have been consistently low or very low between 2008 and 2010. Although overall success rates have improved to just under the national average, this disguises underperformance in many areas of the college. Inspectors judged two curriculum areas as inadequate and the other two as satisfactory. Although inspectors agree with the college that teaching and learning are satisfactory, the college has overestimated the amount of good and better teaching. Poor punctuality and low, sometimes very low attendance are long-standing problems that have not been tackled with sufficient rigour and are inhibiting students' chances of success.
39. Arrangements for quality assurance have been insufficiently rigorous in all areas of the college. The self-assessment process is inclusive and draws upon an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative sources. The college's self-assessment report for 2010/11 is, however, insufficiently critical, overgenerous in its evaluation of college performance and overlooks the importance of a number of key issues, such as low attendance. Data analysis, while good in some respects, is often insufficiently detailed. Targets for improvement, including those in curriculum areas are often insufficiently challenging. Managers are aware of these issues and have begun strengthening quality assurance processes, for example, the current system of observing teaching and learning is currently under review.
40. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. A comprehensive programme of events including mental health awareness, wheelchair basketball and aids awareness celebrates diversity very effectively in the college. Group tutorials raise students' awareness of topics such as harassment, bullying, safety and respect. Data on students' performance in many aspects of the college's work are collected and analysed and inform actions to narrow gaps in achievement. For example, in recent years the college has been successful in reducing the differences in performance between males and females. However,

gaps in performance in other aspects of the college's work remain, including, for example the continuing underperformance of adults on foundation and intermediate programmes. Promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is satisfactory.

41. Governors, managers and staff place high priority on safeguarding students. Safeguarding and safe-recruitment policies are reviewed annually by governors and designated staff to ensure these cover all government requirements. Arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff are rigorous. Vetting checks are carried out on all staff and the college has appropriate records in place to monitor compliance with legislation. The college plays a very active role in both the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and the Adult Safeguarding Board in supporting students in need of help. All staff and governors have been trained to the appropriate level in safeguarding and this is updated regularly. Staff from across the college work very closely together to identify and support students who are vulnerable and at risk. Managers respond quickly and effectively to safety concerns.
42. Arrangements for health and safety are robust and implemented thoroughly. Risk assessments for all college activities including trips and visits are rigorous. Excellent attention is paid to raising students' awareness of e-safety.
43. Value for money is inadequate. Financial management is good and the college is financially sound. Resources for learning are good and many are very good. However, outcomes for students are inadequate.

Subject areas

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 3

Context

44. Courses are offered from entry through to advanced-level. Just under 420 full-time and a little over 100 part-time students are enrolled on hairdressing, beauty therapy, nail services and barbering courses. Around 55% of students are adults. A small number of pupils from local schools attend the college for part of the week. Twelve learners are on apprenticeship programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes vary considerably between courses but are satisfactory overall. Success rates are high on advanced-level courses. On a few intermediate-level courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, success rates are well above the national average. Success rates for significant numbers of students are low in foundation-level hairdressing, beauty therapy and on intermediate-level barbering courses, often because students do not complete their courses. Overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved and are satisfactory. Attendance at lessons is low.
- Standards of practical skills are good. Students make steady progress and there are effective systems in place to keep students on track with their work. Students develop good professional standards and represent the industry well.
- Students feel safe in and around college and adopt safe practices in their work. Health and safety procedures are implemented consistently and risk assessments are thorough. Students participate well in tutorials and enjoy discussing topics on health and well-being and social and life issues.
- Teaching and learning are good in most lessons. Students are focused and participate fully in a variety of strategies to develop their skills and knowledge. Learning is developed effectively through short progressive steps in a structured and methodical way. Students enjoy their lessons and have high regard for each other and their tutors. Imaginative use of ILT reinforces students' knowledge and understanding. In the less effective lessons, a lack of planning to ensure a good range of activities often resulted in slow-paced and dull learning.
- The range of courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy is broad and opportunities to progress to higher levels are good. Teachers are sensitive to those students facing barriers to learning and operate a flexible timetable. Realistic work environments enable students to develop their technical and personal skills, especially on paying clients. However, work-placement opportunities are insufficient.
- Good partnership working that benefits students is a strong feature of the area. Highly regarded organisations work with staff and students to enhance their development of skills, knowledge and understanding through training, seminars

and demonstrations. Good enrichment opportunities enhance students' development of technical hairdressing and beauty therapy skills.

- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students feel well supported and are very positive about their whole-college experience. Staff recognise the importance of providing additional learning and pastoral support, and students value this. However, in a number of cases, students are guided and placed on a level of course too low for their vocational ability.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The self-assessment process is inclusive and areas for improvement are accurately identified. Managers and staff recognise the need to improve low success rates. However, target setting is insufficiently aspirational and targets for improvement on underperforming courses lack challenge. Staff are appropriately qualified and there is a strong culture of professional development.

What does Knowsley Community College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the success rates on lower-level programmes by analysing thoroughly why too many students leave before the end of their courses. Use this analysis to inform and implement action plans to improve student retention.
- Monitor students' attendance more rigorously and intervene more promptly to rectify low or persistent absence.
- Review the current enrolment policy to ensure that all students are guided onto courses at the level that suits their prior vocational skills and abilities.
- Widen the use and analysis of data and use this to set aspirational and challenging targets to tackle underperformance and maintain existing high standards.

Visual, performing arts and media

Grade 3

Context

45. The college offers courses in media, music, visual arts and performing arts. Most subjects are offered from foundation through to advanced-level. Approximately 500 students are enrolled on courses in the area. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and just over half of all students are female.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. On A-level courses in art and design and in communication, success rates are high, as they are on advanced-vocational courses in performing arts, music and acting. GCSE A* to C pass rates have improved and are high. Success rates at AS level are satisfactory. Success rates on media and music courses and performing arts at intermediate level are declining and below the national average, sometimes significantly so.
- Value-added data indicate that most students achieve the grades they should in comparison to their prior attainment. However, students studying AS- and A-level film studies and those on vocational media courses at advanced level do not achieve as well as they should. In lessons observed during inspection, most students made at least satisfactory progress. Attendance at lessons is low.
- Students enjoy college, feel safe and use safe working practices in practical studios and when working in public spaces. Many community projects enhance and enrich students' experiences significantly, for example, highly successful performances in local respite homes, creative art work with groups who have mental health issues, and joint work with Merseyside Police in community projects to deter drink driving.
- Most students produce work of a satisfactory standard. Students on intermediate courses in music and performing arts often produce good standards of work, for example, in applying newly-acquired skills in composition and improvised dance and music pieces. However, at advanced-level, work often lacks the creative development of ideas and higher-level analysis of concepts.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the more effective lessons, students use ILT well to develop creative solutions in art and performance. Teachers encourage personal experimental approaches to learning in a wide variety of materials, techniques and styles of art and performance. However, teachers do not always make it clear what students are required to do and their expectations of what students could achieve are often pitched too low.
- Assessment for learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons, peer- and self-assessment help students to reflect on their learning and the standards of their work successfully. However, in many lessons the use of questioning to assess learning is insufficient. Written feedback on assessed work does not provide sufficient detail to guide students in how to improve their work.

- The range of courses and options for students is good. Partnerships with specialist arts and media organisations and community groups are very good. Students benefit significantly through successful engagement in local and national competitions, and through visits to galleries, performances and professional studios, locally, nationally and internationally. Students have insufficient opportunities for work placements.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students benefit from the support of technicians who often provide additional support for individuals and groups of students in specialist practical areas. Students who are at risk of leaving college or falling behind in their work are identified and discussed in course team meetings. However, resulting actions are not always sufficiently detailed or timely enough to effect improvement.
- The promotion and embedding of equality and diversity are adequate. Many assignments and external projects promote equality and challenge stereotypical attitudes well. For example, a project to highlight issues arising from the 2011 Liverpool riots enabled students to identify and challenge their own attitudes towards social inclusion. However, teachers give insufficient thought to the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons and opportunities to promote these themes are often not explored fully enough.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Communication is good and teams are supportive of one another. However, quality assurance processes are not driving improvement sufficiently quickly or consistently. Data are not analysed in sufficient detail and causes of underperformance are not always identified. Targets are set but these are too often insufficiently challenging. Areas of concern are identified but actions for improvement are too vague and not easily measured.
- Good studio spaces, including those in partner organisations, provide light and spacious areas particularly for practical arts subjects that enhance students' experiences significantly. Personalised spaces for advanced-level art and design students are used well and provide good learning spaces to continue learning beyond classroom time.

What does Knowsley Community College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates in underperforming areas by monitoring students' punctuality, attendance and progress more closely. Implement more swiftly and rigorously college support systems for students who are at risk of leaving college or failing to reach their full potential.
- Improve managers' and teachers' understanding of data, including value-added measures, to enable them to identify underperforming courses more accurately. Use detailed analysis of data to inform realistic but challenging targets at individual student and course level. Provide staff training in writing actions plans that are precise and measurable and use these to target improvement where it is most needed and to maintain high performing courses.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all students achieve their potential. Use the good practice existing in the college and elsewhere to help teachers plan lessons that include high levels of stretch and challenge.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 4

Context

46. In the college's 'Essential Skills' section, almost 90 part-time adult students study literacy and numeracy from entry through to intermediate level, mainly in community venues. Approximately 817 full-time students are enrolled on one or both of functional English or mathematics courses. In the college's 'Supported Learning' section, 76 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities follow various courses including literacy and/or numeracy provision.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are inadequate. Success rates for key skills in literacy and numeracy between 2008 and 2010 were low and for functional skills in 2010/11 very low for significant numbers of full-time students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve success rates that are above the national average.
- Achievement at entry level for adult literacy and numeracy is good, although the numbers taking these qualifications declined markedly in 2010/11 as a result of reduced funding for adults. Success rates for adults on short courses at foundation and intermediate level are low.
- Students feel safe in college. They feel well supported by their teachers. Students are able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being and appreciate the good range of specialist services available in college to support them.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in 'Essential Skills' are inadequate. In the better lessons, teaching is well planned and structured. For example, in numeracy lessons starter activities are used effectively to engage students and develop their mental mathematics skills. Probing questions are used to check learning of concepts of, for example dimension, linking to practical applications such as perimeter, area and volume that occur in everyday life.
- In weaker lessons, teachers do not make it clear what students will be doing. In these lessons, teachers pay insufficient attention to developing students' confidence or their independence in, for example functional mathematics problem solving. In less effective sessions, a limited range of activities inhibited opportunities to stretch and challenge students. As a result, students tended to lose interest and drift off task and the pace of learning slowed.
- For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, teaching and support for literacy and numeracy are good. Speaking and listening skills in one session were developed creatively through a collaborative storytelling activity. Numeracy skills of handling data including estimating, counting, sorting, classifying and recording on graphs and charts were developed through a practical investigation that engaged and challenged students very well.
- Assessment processes and target setting for the majority of full- and part-time students are inadequate. Individual learning plans are used insufficiently

rigorously to set targets and monitor progress and achievement. In too many cases, information derived from initial or diagnostic assessments is not included in the individual learning plan. Targets are not measurable and in the majority of cases there are no dates for the review or completion of actions. Teachers' written feedback is insufficient to help students improve.

- In the 'Supported Learning' section provision meets students' needs very well. For the much larger numbers of students in the 'Essential Skills' section, the college has failed to meet their needs satisfactorily. For several years, too many students have failed to achieve their qualifications. A revised curriculum model is in place but it is too soon to comment on its impact.
- Leadership and management of the 'Essential Skills' area are inadequate in responding to poor success rates. Although remedial actions are now in place, managers have been slow to react to reductions in funding for adult courses. They have been equally slow in devising a coherent and effective literacy and numeracy strategy for full-time students in the college.
- Frequent changes in qualifications, poor quality assurance, including that of sub-contracted provision, and insufficiently rigorous approaches to setting targets and monitoring student progress have contributed to a pattern of low success rates.

What does Knowsley Community College need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates in 'Essential Skills' by encouraging teachers to use a broader range of strategies and a greater variety of activities to engage and challenge all students. Improve the use of students' assessment information to help teachers plan and deliver lessons that ensure the needs of all abilities are met.
- Review the format and use of the individual learning plan in 'Essential Skills'. Ensure the outcomes of initial and diagnostic assessment are included in the plan. Set individual student targets that are realistic but challenging and negotiate short-term goals with students to help them achieve their targets and keep them motivated. Monitor students' progress rigorously and take swift action where underperformance is identified.
- Improve teachers' use of assessment. Provide more meaningful written feedback to all students so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to reach their targets.
- Explore good practice in literacy and numeracy provision. Evaluate what works well in existing college provision and elsewhere and use this to inform a coherent and strategic approach for the provision of literacy and numeracy in the college and for adults in the community.

Business administration and law

Grade 4

Context

47. Full- and part-time courses are offered in business, accounting, law and administration across both college sites. Provision is managed separately on each site. Many subjects run from foundation through to advanced level and to foundation degree. Currently, almost 300 students are enrolled on college-based courses. Nearly 60% of students are adults. The majority of students study advanced-level programmes. Just under 70 apprentices and 18 learners are following NVQs in the workplace business administration and customer service.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are inadequate. Success rates in most subjects have declined and are low or very low. Too few AS- and A-level students achieve their qualifications, except in A-level law where success rates have been consistently high. Progression from AS to A level is low. Success rates are low for too many students on vocational courses. College data suggest that new retention strategies are starting to have a positive impact.
- The overall success rate for apprentices has improved recently to a satisfactory level. The rate for advanced apprentices has declined to well below the national rate. Success within the planned time for learners on NVQs in the workplace is satisfactory.
- Value-added data for 2010/11 indicate that students on advanced-level programmes make the progress expected of them in comparison with their prior attainment. Current students make satisfactory progress in lessons and develop appropriate employability skills. Students feel safe at college, treat each other with respect and work well together.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are pockets of excellent practice, but too many lessons, particularly in AS- and A-level classes, are dull, uninspiring and fail to engage students. As a result, students' progress is slow. The use of ILT is unimaginative. Attendance in lessons is unsatisfactory. Students' behaviour is good.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Students' work is assessed promptly, but not all feedback is sufficiently detailed and specific to help students make progress. Internal verification is well organised and thorough. The monitoring of student progress against expected achievement is systematic but lacks rigour. Targets are insufficiently challenging.
- The range of provision offered by the department is satisfactory. The number of students, including pupils aged 14 to 16, studying in this area has declined sharply since 2009/10. Currently, no students are enrolled on foundation level programmes.
- Partnerships with employers are good and improving. The newly established vocational team has developed effective links with a range of local employers

enabling them to be more responsive to the needs of the community. The department works collaboratively with local school sixth forms enabling students to access college provision. Partnerships with other colleges and local universities are well established.

- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Group tutorials follow the college programme and are enjoyed and valued by students. A designated student adviser provides effective academic and learning support and guidance on next steps for students progressing to higher education or employment.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. An insufficient focus on quality assurance and a lack of coordinated action between teams on the two college sites have resulted in low outcomes for too many students, too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning, and declining enrolment. Managers in the area recognise the need to improve outcomes for students and the quality of teaching and learning and actions are in now place.

What does Knowsley Community College need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards by ensuring that all teaching is at least good. Share good practice among the teams across the area and ensure that students have a consistently high quality experience that enthuses and challenges them to achieve their best.
- Tackle low attendance by raising students' expectations and following up non attendance rigorously.
- Improve assessment practice by ensuring that all students receive good quality written feedback that informs them of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the rigour of target setting and monitoring of students' progress. Ensure that all targets are sufficiently challenging and intervene swiftly where a lack of progress is identified.
- Improve the coordination between managers and teams across both sites to ensure a more consistent and rigorous approach to quality assurance of the provision and to promote better sharing of best practice.

Information about the inspection

48. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's assistant principal for quality and curriculum as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

49. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of students and employers. They also looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Knowsley Community College
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled students	2390	0	1570	820	0
Full-time students	3805	227	222	1133	2223
Part-time students					
Overall effectiveness	4	3	4	4	3
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for students	4	3	4	4	3
How well do students achieve and enjoy their learning?	4				
How well do students attain their learning goals?	4				
How well do students progress?	3				
How well do students improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	4				
How safe do students feel?	2				
<i>Are students able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
<i>How well do students make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	3				
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for students?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support students receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	4				
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	4				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of students?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for students?	4				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	4				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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