

North West Kent College

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Richard Moore HMI

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Information about the provider

1. North West Kent College is a large general further education college situated on two main sites in Dartford and Gravesend. The area is one of considerable ongoing economic development and regeneration. The unemployment rate in north Kent is just over 12% and is higher than the regional average, but slightly lower than the national rate. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups who attend the college is around 11%, which reflects the local population.
2. The college's catchment area operates a system of selective schooling, and almost all local schools have their own sixth form. GCE A-level provision at the college is small. The proportion of 16-year-olds in the area who achieve five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is below the national average. Around 170 pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools attend the college to study vocational courses.
3. The college offers provision in 14 subject areas, with the largest numbers of enrolments in health and social care, engineering, construction, sport, performing arts, preparation for life and work and business administration and accounting. It has grown significantly in recent years and is now an almost wholly vocational college. In 2009/10 there were 4,411 full-time learners of whom about 85% were aged 16 to 18.
4. A significant number of part-time learners attend specialist short courses offered in maritime studies, refrigeration and air conditioning, fire training, health and safety and sustainable construction. The college also offers apprenticeships and programmes under Train to Gain. It is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in accounting and financial services.
5. The college provides no training on behalf of other providers.
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - ABM Training UK Ltd
 - Endeavour Foyer
 - South Eastern Vocational Training Academy Ltd
 - Thor Security Consultants Ltd
 - TLT Academy
 - M2 Training Ltd.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to 18)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>233 part-time learners</p> <p>3,686 full-time learners</p> <p>695 part-time learners</p> <p>126 full-time learners</p> <p>56 part-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>725 full-time learners</p> <p>2,914 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Train to Gain</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>	<p>292 learners</p> <p>287 apprentices</p>

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	
Health, social care and early years	2
Performing arts	1
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL	3
Accounting, administration and business management	2

Overall effectiveness

- North West Kent is a satisfactory college. Managers have brought about clear improvements in the last two years which are starting to have a significant and positive impact on the college, although overall performance since the last inspection is inconsistent. Outcomes for students have improved and are now in line with national averages for those aged 16 to 18 and above for adult students. They are satisfactory for learners on work-based programmes and good for pupils aged 14 to 16 on vocational courses. Retention and attendance rates remain only satisfactory in some curriculum areas.
- The college demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. Managers are ambitious to continue to build on last year's improvements in students' outcomes, and have used self-assessment well to identify accurately most of the college's strengths and areas requiring further improvement. Recent strategies to bring about improvement have had a marked impact in some subject areas, but not in all parts of the college. Teaching and learning are

satisfactory and the college realises there is more work to do to ensure better consistency in classroom practice. Steps to bring about a more realistic approach to assessing the quality of teaching and learning are starting to have a positive effect.

9. The college has good partnerships with local schools, employers and other external partners to meet very diverse needs within the communities served by its two sites. Learners receive good support and progression rates are high. The college ensures the safety of its students well. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory and the college has made good progress in reducing the differences in success rates between men and women at foundation and advanced levels. However, differences still exist in how well teachers promote equality within the classroom. Governance is good and the college provides good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall for students aged 16 to 18 and good for adult learners. They have improved for students of all ages in the last year and significantly so for adult learners. Success rates were below average for students aged 16 to 18 on advanced-level courses in 2008/09 and 2007/08, but improvements in the last year have brought them into line with national averages. Success rates for adult learners are now above national averages, particularly on foundation level courses where they are very high.
- Most students on vocational courses develop good practical and technical skills. This supports them well for their next stages in further study or employment. They enjoy their learning, although attendance at lessons is only satisfactory and punctuality is poor in some subject areas. Students on advanced courses make good progress during their time at college. Key skills success rates are high overall.
- Progression rates to higher level courses or employment are a significant strength of the college. Last year, 85% of students leaving the college progressed to a higher level of full-time study or into work. Rates of progression within the college are also high.
- Outcomes for students were judged by inspectors to be outstanding in performing arts and good in health and social care, early years, accounting, administration and business management. They were satisfactory for students on literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. Success rates in many curriculum areas improved dramatically last year, but this trend has not been consistent across the college.
- Outcomes for apprentices and learners on Train to Gain programmes have improved in the last year and are now satisfactory overall, although success rates are much higher for advanced apprentices than for the larger numbers of apprentices. Pupils aged 14 to 16 achieve well on vocational programmes.

- Students feel safe in college and appreciate the good security on both sites. They demonstrate good working practices and know to whom they should report any concerns about their health and safety.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The college has implemented a number of well-considered strategies over the last year to improve the accuracy of its lesson observation scheme, but these have not yet been fully effective. Insufficient challenge for more able students, the narrow range of teaching strategies and better promotion of equality and diversity in lessons are the most significant aspects requiring improvement. Additional learning support is good. However, not all students have sufficiently detailed and meaningful learning targets.
- The range of provision at both college sites is good and meets the needs and interests of users well. The college plans its vocational offer to reflect skills requirements within the local economy. The offer also provides coherent progression routes to further study or employment. The college has discontinued some AS- and A-level courses which no longer match students' needs.
- Partnerships with local schools and employers are very effective. The college has made a major contribution to the development of specialist diplomas in consultation with schools in the area. It works closely with employers on a number of innovative and successful initiatives in retail and construction. The arrangements for gathering employers' views on the services provided by the college are not sufficiently thorough.
- Students value the good care, guidance and support they receive. Through the college, students have access to a wide range of external support agencies. The good advice and guidance given to students help them to progress well both within and from the college. Personal support is highly effective.
- Senior managers and governors have set a clear strategic direction for the college, focusing strongly on improving quality and raising standards in tandem with continued growth in student numbers. Managers have started to develop successfully a culture of consistent improvement, although this is yet to have a consistent impact across all of the college.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college has reduced variations in success rates between different groups. Students respect each other and their teachers. Reinforcement of students' understanding of equality and diversity is better in some curriculum areas than in others where it is only satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding are good.
- Quality assurance and improvement processes have improved significantly over the last two years and are leading to noticeable improvements, although not at the same rate in all areas. Good practice in self-assessment and action planning now takes place in a number of curriculum areas, as does the better use of data to support improvement strategies. However, this is not yet consistent throughout the college.

What does North West Kent College need to do to improve further?

- Take systematic and closely-monitored steps to improve the retention of students in those curriculum areas with low success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on advanced courses.
- Improve the success rates, including those achieved in the planned time, for apprentices aged 16 to 18 through closer monitoring of their progress and involving employers more effectively in planning assessment tasks.
- Increase the proportion of good and better lessons by widening the range and effectiveness of the learning activities that teachers use, including those that extend the more able students.
- Ensure that best practice in target setting is shared and used across the college, so that all students have meaningful, appropriate and challenging goals.
- Strengthen the arrangements for gathering and using employers' views.
- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity in some curriculum areas through better awareness by teachers of opportunities to incorporate examples within their teaching.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the way in which the college treats them as adults so they feel valued and respected
- the way in which their courses and practical work in particular prepare them for employment and/or progression to further and higher education
- the culture of respect and good behaviour across the college
- the very supportive teachers
- the timetabling of courses to meet the needs of different groups of students, and which enables them to reduce travel costs and to work part-time
- the really good careers guidance
- the much improved facilities at the Gravesend campus.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the frequency and timeliness of the shuttle bus service
- the number of car parking spaces at both sites
- the time it takes to queue in the refectories
- the amount of timetable changes in some curriculum areas.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the commercial awareness of college staff
- the way in which the college works with employers to develop the curriculum
- the good involvement they have in assessors' review visits to students in the workplace.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the way in which the college keeps some employers informed of how well their employees are progressing on their courses.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

10. The college's capacity to make and sustain improvement is satisfactory. Managers and governors have set clear priorities for the college after a period of rapid growth, focusing more now on continuous improvement and raising standards. Staff are supportive of the increased focus on students' achievements. Good progress has been made in implementing more rigorous quality assurance systems and self-assessment is largely accurate. However, managers acknowledge that there is still variability in the quality of evaluation in different curriculum areas. Increased rigour in the accuracy of the lesson observation scheme is now starting to have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning.
11. Overall success rates on long courses were just below national averages prior to last year, but improved to just above the 2008/09 average in 2009/10. The college does not yet demonstrate that it has sustained trends in improvement at high rates or that it has maintained high levels of performance. Improvements have varied considerably across age groups, levels and curriculum areas. Managers acknowledge that subject areas are at different stages of development. Some departments are now able to conduct quite rigorous and evaluative self-assessment, whilst others are less able to do this to the same level. The use of learners' views to secure improvements is satisfactory overall, but insufficient as regards employers' feedback.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

12. Effective management action has brought about recent improvements in success rates during the last year, after a period of two years following the last inspection in which success rates on long courses were below national averages. For the large cohort of students aged 16 to 18 this has raised success rates on long courses in 2009/10 from below average to the national average. They are now satisfactory. Success rates for adult learners have improved significantly and are now high. Pupils aged 14 to 16 achieve well and most stay on in post-16 education and training.
13. Outcomes for students aged 16 to 18 are satisfactory and broadly in line with national averages on foundation programmes, but have risen very significantly for adult students to be very high and well above national averages. On intermediate level courses, success rates for both age groups improved to be above average. They are satisfactory and just below national averages for students aged 16 to 18 at advanced level, but are high for adult learners, having improved significantly from being well below the national average in 2008/09 to being well above it last year.
14. Students achieve well in some curriculum areas judged as mainly good by the college. There have been significant and rapid improvements in success rates in

the last year in health and social care, public services, motor vehicle, construction, information and communication technology, performing arts, accounting, finance and business management. Most of these areas now perform above or well above national averages. However, success rates are low and remain below or well below average in public services, science, hospitality and catering, sport, languages and skills for life. In a small number of areas, performance has declined in 2009/10. The college has analysed the reasons for these variations in performance and is taking actions to rectify the issues affecting some success rates, notably regarding retention of students.

15. Most students on vocational courses develop good practical and technical skills which support them well for their next stages in further study or employment. Progression rates to higher level courses or employment are a significant strength of the college. Last year, 85% of students leaving the college progressed to a higher level of full-time study or into work. Progression rates for students on foundation learning courses are high, particularly to further education. Attendance rates are satisfactory, but punctuality is poor in some areas of the college.
16. Many students have relatively low levels of literacy and numeracy skills when they start their courses. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades is low on GCSE English and mathematics courses. However, key skills success rates are high overall, particularly in application of number and information technology. They are satisfactory for key skills in communication.
17. Outcomes for work-based learners have improved in the last year and are now satisfactory. However, there remain some significant differences between curriculum areas and levels of qualification. Most notably, advanced apprentices perform much better than apprentices. Success rates, completed in the planned time, for apprenticeships overall are now well above national averages. Students develop good work-based skills.
18. The college monitors achievements by different groups of students carefully and there are no significant differences for the small numbers in various minority ethnic groups. The college has taken effective steps to reduce the gaps in performance at foundation and intermediate levels between males and females.
19. Students feel very safe in the college. They are knowledgeable about safe working practices and procedures for reporting any concerns they may have. Security arrangements are good at both college sites. A significant minority of students do not always wear their identity badges in communal areas as required by college rules. Teachers promote health and safety well in workshops and practical sessions. Students feel at ease in discussing sexual health matters in tutorials with their tutors. The promotion of healthy eating is satisfactory at both college sites.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

20. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Inspectors found very little variation in the quality of teaching and learning within and across subject areas. Most lessons were good or satisfactory, with very little outstanding and no inadequate teaching. Many teachers plan their lessons effectively, encouraging students to participate enthusiastically and to work hard. Teachers integrate functional skills well with vocational topics. Work-based learning students attend interesting lessons and practical activities taught well in industry settings. Some teachers promote equality and diversity very well in lessons, but this is not always the case across the whole college. In a small number of classes, teaching is dull and based on a narrow range of learning activities. A few lessons take place in cramped or noisy classrooms that restrict learning.
21. Inspectors found good examples of students using information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons and particularly so in performing arts where students have access to innovative and extensive electronic learning resources. The college has invested significantly in ILT and teachers use it well to enliven their lessons with a wide range of interesting online learning activities.
22. Insufficient challenge for more able students is a feature of less effective teaching and learning. The pace of some lessons is too slow and teachers do not focus sufficiently on the needs of individual students. Some teachers do not use additional activities well to challenge the more able students and to extend their learning.
23. Assessment practice is satisfactory. It is both fair and accurate. Students receive timely and constructive feedback from teachers which enables them to improve their assignment work and grades. Some students have very detailed and well-planned personal and learning targets which staff monitor regularly during progress reviews. However, some teachers do not always refer back sufficiently to previous targets set. The college has identified this as an area for improvement which it is working hard to tackle through training and better quality assurance.
24. The college manages additional learning support well. A high proportion of students have low levels of literacy and numeracy skills and the college has responded well to the consequent demand for additional learning support. Students receiving extra support achieve well and have higher success rates than the college average. Those attending individual or group sessions in the learning centres receive good support. The quality of in-class support is satisfactory, although some teachers do not always plan the use of learning assistants sufficiently well.
25. The college offers a wide range of provision which meets the needs and interests of users well. The strong focus on vocational programmes reflects the need for the skills required in the regeneration of the local area. The college plans its provision carefully to provide coherent progression routes at all levels within the college and to higher education. The improved accommodation at

the Gravesend site has allowed the college to expand some of its provision there to meet identified local needs. Where local schools have reported increased demand from their pupils for certain types of courses, the college has responded well through, for example, providing more sport and catering programmes.

26. The college incorporates most of its enrichment offer within subject areas rather than offering a discrete programme of activities. Students appreciate the positive effect this has on their personal and social development. Students in some curriculum areas, such as accounting and business administration, benefit from high quality work placements with prestigious employers, which lead to full-time employment opportunities.
27. Partnerships with local schools and employers are very effective. The college has played a significant role in the development of specialist diplomas for schools in the area. The college runs a successful foundation learning tier course with a variety of vocational options for young people who are not in education, employment or training. Pupils from special schools benefit from the opportunity to sample college courses and many of them progress to full-time education at the college. Close working with employers has resulted in a number of innovative and successful initiatives, particularly in retail and construction. The college encourages good links with community groups through supporting events at weekends and in the evenings.
28. Care, guidance and support for students are good. Support staff in the college are well qualified and very experienced in offering advice and guidance. Progression rates are high both within the college and into further training or employment. Students have access to a wide range of external support agencies and specialist organisations with expertise in, for example, finance and housing. Group tutorials cover the 'Every Child Matters' themes well and students feel at ease in discussing sensitive issues with teachers and other staff. Personal support for students is highly effective and involves regular one-to-one meetings between learners and members of the college support staff team.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

29. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The relatively new senior management team has set a clear strategic direction for the college, integrating the previously successful growth in student numbers with an increased focus on quality and raising standards. Staff at all levels have welcomed this change in emphasis at a time of continued expansion and a major rebuilding programme. Middle managers and staff speak very positively about how the recently appointed Principal and vice principal have enabled them to contribute more directly to planning and reviewing the provision.
30. Senior managers and governors have set clear targets for further improvement in students' achievements. In previous years, targets were set at faculty level, but for the coming year they focus on each age group at all levels, ensuring a

greater understanding of overall college performance. Heads of school agree specific targets for each course with programme leaders. The college monitors progress towards targets at individual school level and for the college as a whole. This has helped senior managers and governors to have a better understanding of strengths and areas for improvement across the college.

31. Governance is good. Governors receive regular and clear reports identifying key aspects of the college's performance which have enhanced their ability to question and challenge senior managers more effectively. Members of the corporation use their expertise well to support the college and have been chosen carefully to bring a broad range of experience to the work of the college. Governors involve themselves directly in biennial school quality reviews and through links with specific curriculum areas. They have received appropriate training in safeguarding and equality and diversity and ensure that the college meets its statutory requirements in both respects. The corporation's own self-assessment identifies ways in which the governing body can improve its effectiveness still further.
32. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. The college has a comprehensive range of detailed policies and procedures for the safe recruitment and treatment of both students and staff. It takes its safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and has devoted considerable time over recent months to ongoing improvements in procedures and practice. The college is a harmonious and respectful environment. All staff have carried out safeguarding training within the required time periods. Senior managers review safeguarding arrangements regularly and the governors receive informative reports on both safeguarding and health and safety. The monitoring of health and safety and the management of risk are thorough across all college on-site and off-site activities.
33. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college has revised its policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and has developed a comprehensive single equality scheme. Managers monitor the performance of different groups of students and have been successful in narrowing gaps in performance, particularly between males and females. The college has had mixed success in developing strategies to increase participation by under-represented groups of students in areas, such as health and social care, early years and construction.
34. The college has strengthened its integration of equality and diversity themes within various aspects of its work through staff training. The revised tutorial scheme, introduced in September 2010, now includes specific topics designed to increase students' awareness and understanding of equality and diversity. Inspectors saw good examples of the promotion of equality in lessons, but the college acknowledges that staff in some curriculum areas are still at an early stage of incorporating equality and diversity in their teaching materials, lesson plans and assignments.

35. The college makes regular use of students' feedback to evaluate the quality of provision and to support improvements. Students participate in school quality reviews and student representatives increasingly attend course and team meetings. The college also seeks employers' views on the quality of its training. Whilst this feedback is productive in some areas, the overall analysis is not yet sufficiently consistent or comprehensive with regard to all of the college's employer-related work.
36. Quality assurance processes were identified as a key area for development at the last inspection and the college has made significant improvements to its self-assessment processes, particularly in the last two years. Biennial school quality reviews draw on a wide range of evidence to evaluate the quality of provision and to identify areas for further improvement. The use of performance data has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. Whilst the quality of self-assessment and use of data vary between curriculum areas, senior managers have a good understanding of where staff require further training and support to develop the appropriate skills to improve their self-evaluation.
37. The college acknowledges that systems for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning have not been sufficiently rigorous in the past and that grades given during lesson observations were sometimes over generous. Managers have now strengthened the arrangements for observing classes through training a central team of observers and improved moderation of grades. Joint observations carried out by the college and inspectors indicate that college observers are now accurate in their judgements and grading.
38. The college has invested significant amounts of capital in improving its accommodation at both its main sites. Learning resources are good, and specialist equipment and resources are excellent in some areas. The college manages its finances and resources well and, taking into consideration the significant improvement in outcomes for many students last year, it provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health, social care and early years

Grade 2

Context

39. There are 509 current enrolments on full-time and substantial part-time courses, with slightly more students aged 16 to 18, almost all of whom are full-time. Just over 100 learners are on Train to Gain programmes in adult care. Early years provision takes place at both college main sites, but the health and social care courses are offered at Dartford only.

Key findings

- Success rates on the majority of courses are good, particularly in health and social care where they rose significantly in 2009/10 to be above national averages. Success rates on early years programmes have remained the same over the last two years and are just above the national average. They are high on most intermediate courses in both subject areas and on the national diploma in health and social care where retention has shown a significant improvement.
- Students' progression to both higher-level courses within the college and from advanced level programmes to employment or higher education is good. Over 70% of students progressed from foundation to intermediate courses last year and almost the same proportion moved from advanced level provision within the two subject areas to higher education.
- Students enjoy their learning and feel safe. They work well together and are well motivated and enthusiastic about their studies. Attendance and punctuality are good. Students feel confident that staff will respond appropriately to their concerns. They develop good computing skills as part of their vocational learning.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan most lessons well, using ILT and vocationally-related models and equipment effectively to add interest to their teaching. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of extension activities and learning materials to stretch the more able students.
- The monitoring of progress is highly effective for most students. Assessment practices are good and timely feedback to students enables them to progress well. The inclusion of specific timetabled weeks for assignments ensures most students complete their work on time. However, staff do not use the recently introduced electronic tutorial profiling system consistently yet and this results in some students not having copies of their learning plan or not being able to access it from their home computer.
- Effective partnerships enhance the vocational relevance of courses and students' learning. Teachers benefit from staff development through working in partnership with the local authority's early years unit, children's centres and hospitals, and are able to pass this expertise on to students. Learners develop specific skills from these partnerships, such as an understanding of speech and

linguistic therapies. However, there is no consistent formal use of employers' feedback to assist in the design and delivery of courses.

- Rigorous recruitment and selection processes ensure students enrol on the most appropriate type and level of course to suit their individual needs. The procedure includes a pre-enrolment ten-day work placement to allow students to assess whether the types of work involved in health and social care or early years will suit them.
- Curriculum management is good. Managers have focused strongly on improvements to the quality of the provision over the last year and success rates have risen on almost all courses. Good communication and an inclusive and approachable leadership style encourage teaching staff to raise their expectations and promote good teaching and learning. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and is an inclusive process.
- The promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum area is satisfactory. Efforts to recruit more males and people from minority ethnic groups have been largely unsuccessful. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory and ensure all students, staff and work placements meet the necessary criteria.

What does North West Kent College need to do to improve further?

- Extend the existing good practice in the recruitment of students and the monitoring of their progress to improve the success rates on a small number of courses.
- Improve access for students to their learning targets during individual tutorials and through the college intranet when they are working from home.
- Develop new approaches to gather and use formal feedback from employers which can assist in the decision-making about, and content and teaching of, new courses.
- Use existing contacts from partnerships with industry to increase the numbers of males and students from minority ethnic groups.

Performing arts

Grade 1

Context

40. Currently, 379 students study vocational programmes in dance, musical theatre, acting, theatre production, music and music technology from intermediate to advanced level. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and study on full-time programmes with a range of additional qualifications. The numbers of male and female students overall are approximately equal and 11% come from a minority ethnic background. A larger proportion of men study music courses and more women enrol on dance programmes.

Key findings

- Student outcomes are outstanding. Success rates are high and have improved significantly over the last year. This is mainly owing to a rise in retention rates on long courses. The greatest improvements have been in intermediate performing arts diplomas and advanced dance and theatre production diplomas. Success rates on short courses are very high.
- Students achieve very high standards of work in theatre production and in drama and dance performances. Acting students perform confidently as an ensemble and are accomplished in the art of physical theatre. Dance students have very high levels of technical and creative ability. Students on theatre production courses produce striking sets and costumes.
- Students on acting and theatre production courses make very good progress relative to their previous attainment. Progression to employment and higher education is particularly good from the technical theatre course. A high proportion of students secure places on further training programmes or move into relevant employment.
- Practical teaching and learning are very good. Teachers encourage students to develop excellent independent study skills and to take responsibility for rehearsals and supporting each other outside of formal classes. Students involve themselves fully in evaluating their own practical work and the work of others, thereby practising their very well developed critical skills. However, some theory lessons lack pace and sufficient opportunities for students to evaluate their own progress.
- Feedback from teachers to students on their assessed work is very thorough. It identifies their strengths clearly and helps them to improve the quality of their work. Students provide constructive and incisive feedback to each other in lessons and using web-based 'blogs'.
- The curriculum is designed in a highly original way and provides students with excellent opportunities to develop their skills. It is set up to replicate the realistic working environment of a full production company. Students work in departments within the company and produce a number of excellent shows each year. However, the college does not have any foundation level courses.
- Students take part in challenging activities, including meticulously rehearsed physical theatre pieces, in order to produce impressive and creative sets. They

achieve a high level of independence through these activities. Students work in a full-sized circus tent, some of them training as trapeze artists. They have a full and varied timetable and the long hours they work in the studio and in rehearsals prepare them well for their chosen industry.

- Guidance and support for students are outstanding. Staff produce detailed group profiles and are very attentive to individual students' needs. Students are very complimentary about the lengths to which staff go to help them. Tutorials provide very good advice on the effects of both poor diet and health on students' performance work.
- Managers and staff encourage and share in an excellent working atmosphere. They set high standards for students through treating them as members of a theatre and music production company.
- Teachers promote students' awareness of cultural diversity very well through the choice of materials and subjects for productions. Projects include clear identification of what students will learn about equality and diversity. Students' interest in cultural issues is stimulated through their courses. Productions are frequently chosen to promote understanding of matters relating to equality.
- An extremely wide range of resources ensures students have exceptional opportunities to develop their skills. Theatre production workshops are spacious and very well equipped. The temporary music rehearsal studios provide excellent facilities whilst the construction of new buildings is taking place.

What does North West Kent College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the standard of theory teaching so that students have more opportunity to evaluate their own progress during lessons.
- Increase the opportunities available for students new to performing arts through the introduction of a foundation level course.

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 3

Context

41. The school of foundation learning offers programmes within the department and across the college. Currently, 82 students aged 16 to 18 and 55 adults are studying on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, ranging from entry level to intermediate level. Just over 3,000 students are studying functional skills alongside their main vocational qualification. More than 150 students receive additional individual or group literacy, numeracy or dyslexia support in the college's learning centres. A specialist foundation learning curriculum supports a small group of students aged 14 to 16 excluded from school. Although not part of the department, the inspection of this area incorporated the GCSE English and mathematics provision for just over 120 students re-taking these qualifications.

Key findings

- Student outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates on key skills qualifications are high overall, particularly in information technology and application of number. They were also high on adult literacy and numeracy programmes at entry and foundation levels in 2009/10, although the college is no longer offering these qualifications. Success rates on entry level ESOL courses are just below the national average and are low on GCSE English and mathematics at grades A* to C.
- Progression to positive destinations for students from the foundation learning programme is good, with 83% progressing to full-time education or employment last year. In 2008/09, the progression rate was also high at 75%. Students enjoy their vocational training and develop good employability and social skills which they need to progress. They enhance these skills well through a range of additional qualifications.
- Standards of students' work are satisfactory. Students on ESOL courses develop good personal and social skills and satisfactory speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Students feel safe in college and have an appropriate understanding of how they should treat others.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers plan most lessons well and students understand what they are expected to achieve. Teachers are confident in using most aspects of ILT which encourages a similar response from the students. However, weaker lessons are characterised by poor class management, too many whole-group activities and insufficient eliciting of explanations from students. Some teachers do not challenge students' poor punctuality. A small number of classrooms are too small for the number of students in attendance.
- Teaching and learning on foundation learning tier programmes are good. Students benefit from a purposeful learning atmosphere and clear codes of discipline. Teachers challenge any poor behaviour appropriately. They present

complex topics in ways which interest students and match their abilities and chosen vocational options.

- Discrete learning support is good for students at entry and foundation levels. Students make good progress and develop useful learning skills through the support of knowledgeable and skilled staff. They use an extensive range of resources to make learning interesting and relevant.
- Initial assessment is very thorough, although teachers do not always use the information obtained sufficiently well to deliver appropriate learning. Individual learning plans are satisfactory overall, with some being of a very high standard, incorporating clear and easily understood targets based on the outcomes of initial and formative assessment. However, other plans are incomplete and lack any detailed measure of progress made by students.
- The range of provision is satisfactory in meeting the needs of diverse groups of students, with opportunities to progress from entry level to higher-level courses. Many courses have a strong focus on developing personal, social and employability skills alongside language and functional skills. Effective partnerships enhance the range of enrichment activities for students, although their knowledge of these options is poor in some cases.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have introduced more rigorous monitoring systems recently, although it is too early to judge their full impact on students' experiences. Communication between teams is effective and staff work well together. Opportunities for staff development are plentiful. The collection of accurate data has improved, but some subject coordinators are not sufficiently aware of how well their areas are performing.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Cultural awareness is taught well in some lessons, although there are too many missed opportunities to extend this work further.
- The emphasis on quality improvement is satisfactory. Observations of teaching and learning are accurate in identifying strengths and the correct grades, but do not always explore satisfactory aspects of classes and areas for improvement in sufficient detail. The self-assessment report is largely accurate, but does not always present evidence to support the judgements sufficiently clearly.

What does North West Kent College need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning through increased use of small group and pair work to ensure more student participation in lessons. Use more probing questions to challenge students' responses and to check understanding.
- Improve students' attendance and punctuality through teachers applying a more rigorous approach to late arrivals in class.
- Improve the classroom experience for all students through better seating arrangements and clearer presentation of good quality learning materials on interactive whiteboards.
- Ensure that information gathered about students during initial assessment is used more effectively to deliver better teaching to all students and to set them more detailed targets.

Accounting, administration and business management

Grade 2

Context

42. Currently, 839 students are on courses in accounting, administration and business management, three quarters of whom are women, with the same proportion studying part-time. Just over half the students are aged 16 to 18. In addition, 54 students are on work-based learning programmes. Students follow courses predominantly at intermediate and advanced levels in accounting, business studies and legal secretary work at both sites.

Key findings

- Success rates are high on business courses at advanced level and on legal secretary and accounting programmes at intermediate and advanced levels. Students work hard, enjoy their learning and achieve high standards in class. They have good subject knowledge. Many students benefit from gaining additional qualifications. However, the majority of learners on Train to Gain programmes do not achieve their qualification in the planned time.
- Students make good progress in lessons and gain very relevant employability skills. They improve their self-confidence and social skills. Students are ambitious and keen on seeking professional careers. Just over one third of the students progress to higher level further education courses or into higher education, and a further 45% progress into employment.
- The college maintains a strong emphasis on health and safety at both sites and on work placements. Tutorials have a strong focus on healthy lifestyles, sexual health and general health and safety.
- Teaching and learning are good. The best classes incorporate wide-ranging and engaging activities that enliven learning and motivate students well. Teachers plan these lessons methodically and give clear and concise explanations that encourage constructive discussions. Good teamwork between learning support staff and teachers helps maximise students' learning. Target setting is satisfactory.
- A few lessons are lacklustre and boring. The pace of these lessons is slow. Lesson planning fails to identify individual learning needs in sufficient detail. At times, there are too few extension tasks for more able students who then fail to concentrate in lessons.
- The range of courses in law, accounting, management and business is good and assists progression to higher levels. Students attend college for three days a week which saves on their travel costs and helps them pursue part-time work. The integration of functional skills with vocational knowledge is good.
- Very comprehensive partnerships enrich students' contact with employers greatly, often leading to employment. The CoVE offers internships, business mentors and external lectures for business and accounting students. Law and accountancy students benefit from strong links with professional bodies and

employers that enable placements and industry visits. The college has productive links with schools and charities that support students with specific disabilities to obtain appropriate employment.

- Personal support is good, both within the department and through external agencies. Highly informative tutorials offer good advice and guidance on career progression and help in team building. Accurate student profiles identify their needs in detail and students are fully aware of where, and how, to get support.
- Operational management is forward thinking and involves everyone in the department very effectively in sharing future planning and managing change. Managers have a strong focus on changing the course offer to meet new requirements and different types of demand, and on updating equipment. They use data effectively to monitor and analyse performance. Staff are well qualified and benefit from continual professional training, but do not have sufficient opportunities to update their industry skills.
- Classrooms at the Gravesend site are bright, modern and welcoming, but some on the Dartford campus are cluttered and building work disrupts some classes. Too many lessons start late owing to the late arrival of students encountering travel and parking difficulties. Some teachers begin their classes with revision exercises to take account of expected late arrivals.
- Students have a good understanding of equality and diversity. They show each other mutual respect and are very polite and well behaved. The incorporation of older students into classes is beneficial in this respect. The promotion of equality and diversity is embedded well within lesson planning, assignments and tutorials. Recent initiatives to redress gender imbalances on some courses have been effective.
- The self-assessment process is accurate and inclusive and results in well-monitored and effective action planning. Staff are fully involved in self-assessment through meetings, course health checks and departmental 'away days'. Managers use data well to identify trends and to set appropriate targets. The process of observation of teaching and learning is now more self-critical and accurate.

What does North West Kent College need to do to improve further?

- Give further detailed guidance to teachers on how to plan lessons more effectively to meet individual learning needs and how to incorporate extension tasks for more able learners.
- Improve the management of students' late arrival for classes. Investigate more thoroughly the causes of poor punctuality and take action to tackle these.
- Explore ways to widen the scope of staff development further to include commercial updating in industry.

Information about the inspection

43. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the college's director of curriculum, quality and human resources, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
44. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also 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)
North West Kent 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 learners					
Full-time learners	4,925		3,864	1,061	
Part-time learners	3,365	166	402	1,607	1,190
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	2	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	3 2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3				
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?	2				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	3				
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	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 learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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