

South Worcestershire College

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

South Worcestershire College is a small general further education college serving the south of the county of Worcestershire. The two campuses are located close to their respective town centres; the main site is in Evesham and a second campus, which is predominantly an adult education centre, in Malvern. The six secondary schools in the Evesham and Malvern area all have sixth forms. Five further education colleges operate within a 16-mile radius of the college. The college provides mainly vocational courses in 12 subject areas from entry level to advanced level, with the large majority of learners following courses at foundation or intermediate level.

Inspectors judged that the college's overall effectiveness was satisfactory at the last full inspection in January 2010; of the three subject areas inspected in depth, one area, literacy and numeracy was judged inadequate. At the reinspection monitoring visit in September 2010, inspectors judged that the college had made reasonable progress in five of the six themes under consideration, including reasonable progress in improving the subject area previously judged inadequate, and significant progress in the remaining theme.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Literacy and numeracy	4	3

Context

The college offers full-time and part-time courses from entry level to level 2 in literacy and numeracy. Of the 917 learners currently enrolled, over 600 are aged 16 to 18. Most learners are on full-time vocational programmes, where they study English and mathematics leading to functional skills qualifications; the remainder are on courses leading to adult literacy or numeracy certificates. Full-time learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities study literacy and numeracy within their programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for literacy and numeracy qualifications at all levels have improved significantly, with the majority of learners achieving rates above the national average. Adult learners on full-time vocational courses are not as successful in achieving their English and mathematics qualifications as those learners aged 16 to 18.
- All learners receive comprehensive and standardised initial and diagnostic assessments for their functional skills, ensuring that those learners enrolled onto the adult literacy and numeracy courses are working at the correct level, are successful and benefit from progression opportunities.
- However, those learners on full-time vocational courses preparing for the Functional English qualifications, accounting for the large majority of learners,

are not placed consistently onto the right level of course for their individual needs and lack opportunities to progress through the levels of learning.

- Overall, learners are making satisfactory progress but a lack of consistency and rigour in target setting for all learners means there is insufficient challenge to ensure that learners reach their full potential.
- Learners on adult literacy and numeracy courses negotiate effectively their personal targets; they contribute to the review of their individual learning plans but, in a significant minority of cases, timescales for the achievement of targets lack focus. For learners completing functional skills on vocational courses target setting is insufficiently precise.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The majority of lessons show effective planning of group activities and clearly identified learning outcomes for the group. However, planning for individualised learning is insufficient, so that learners are not taking ownership of their personal targets and are not sufficiently clear about the skills they need to develop.
- The better lessons show a wide variety of approaches that are successful in promoting purposeful interaction and discussion with the tutor and each other, to develop learning. In all lessons seen by inspectors, learners completed interesting tasks productively to support their learning.
- In a significant number of lessons learners are unsure about the purpose and relevance of English and mathematics work, as there is little evidence of a relevant, vocational context to the work or of the development of employability skills. However, learners attending the flexible-access literacy and numeracy courses are clear about the relevance of developing these skills in supporting personal goals and aspirations.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has made clear progress in developing a relevant and appropriate Skills for Life strategy. However, development actions are not prioritised, and allotted timeframes are too ambitious to enable achievement of planned outcomes.
- Self-assessment for the area is improving and provides a reliable view of the provision, but there is insufficient cohesion and structure to ensure that developments and improvements for all aspects of the provision are monitored and tracked effectively.
- Plans are in place to ensure that all teachers delivering literacy and numeracy courses will have completed a subject-specialist qualification by the end of the current year. The college has provided relevant professional development and training, including whole-college training for raising awareness and embedding of literacy and numeracy within the college provision.
- Teachers are supported well to share good practice; peer observation processes are developing but it is too early to evaluate their impact on outcomes for learners.

What does South Worcestershire College need to do to improve further?

- Develop and extend the planning of learning to ensure activities in functional skills classes provide a context relevant to vocational courses. Implement fully

plans to develop partnership working between vocational and functional skills teachers; develop further the embedding of functional skills into the teaching of vocational courses.

- Ensure that all learners are working at the correct level based on their prior achievement and learning and are set consistently challenging and individualised targets which promote good progress and ensure they achieve their full potential.
- Evaluate systematically the impact of quality improvement strategies. Ensure that the self-assessment process identifies clearly key development priorities for all aspects of the provision.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this reinspection.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in revising self-assessment procedures to provide a rigorous and accurate statement of the college's strengths and areas for improvement? **Significant progress**

The completed self-assessment report available to inspectors for this inspection demonstrates the same self-critical, systematic and evidence-based approach to self-assessment that was a feature of the documentation provided at the monitoring visit. The self-assessment makes good use of a range of data to evaluate performance, including those on learners' attendance and success. Arrangements to validate self-assessment both at academy level and for the college as a whole are rigorous and well-conceived. The development plan contains appropriate, clear and measurable actions to implement areas for improvement from the self-assessment and incorporates those actions from the post-inspection action plan where these remain relevant. Plans continue to show the participation of senior managers and governors in setting objectives and monitoring progress towards achieving them. Improvements to success rates and attendance, and the improvement in the quality of literacy and numeracy provision from inadequate to satisfactory, demonstrate the impact of self-assessment in improving the provision.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in raising success rates in learner responsive provision by measuring and monitoring learners' progress more effectively? **Reasonable progress**

Final data for 2009/10 show significant increases from the previous year in success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on long courses at both foundation and advanced level, so that both rates were close to the national average for 2009/10. Success rates for adults on long courses show a significant increase at foundation level, as a result of much-improved retention rates, so that this success rate was above the national average for similar colleges in 2009/10. However, both for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults at intermediate level in 2009/10, success rates decreased slightly from the previous year; as a result, for learners aged 16 to 18, success rates at this level remained broadly average, but for adults they fell to a point below the national average for 2009/10. In-year college data for 2010/11 suggest continuing improvement in retention for learners on long courses, in particular at foundation level. The work of the Progression Tutors, and the emphasis the college places on teachers informing learners of their progress on a regular basis, have contributed to these improvements. Success rates in the college's employer responsive provision improved in 2009/10 and were well above 2009/10 national averages.

To what extent has the college been able to raise attendance and to reduce the wide variation in attendance between subject areas? **Significant progress**

Since the previous inspection and subsequent monitoring visit, the college has made significant progress in raising attendance, and in reducing the wide variation in attendance between subject areas. The improvements made show the impact of the work of the Progression Tutors – newly appointed at the time of the last monitoring visit – in following up non-attendance. Monitoring and reporting arrangements have ensured that learners are aware of the importance of attendance at all lessons and have ensured the implementation of appropriate interventions where learners are identified as at risk of underachieving or withdrawing from their courses.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the accuracy of lesson observations and in sharing good practice in teaching and learning more effectively? **Significant progress**

At the monitoring visit in September 2010, inspectors noted the improved accuracy and reliability of lesson observation and the rigour of arrangements to standardise the observation process across the team of observers. Records sampled during this monitoring visit demonstrate continuing rigour in the standardisation of the observation process and the moderation of judgements, to ensure an appropriate focus on learning and to ensure the validity of stated strengths of the lesson. Links between lesson observation and teachers' appraisals remain systematic and timely. The college provides highly individualised development for teachers; this has been effective in improving their professional practice, as is evident from subsequent observations. Arrangements to share good practice are sound and are having an impact on the quality of lessons.

What progress has been made in ensuring that development plans identify challenging targets and focus sharply on how to achieve the college's strategic aims? **Significant progress**

Completion of the self-assessment has enabled the college to re-appraise and specify in detail the milestones in the strategic plan. These are realistic and show an appropriately progressive challenge to enable the college to achieve its strategic aims. The role of each academy in meeting strategic objectives is clear and transparent. Arrangements to monitor progress and to report through to the governors' Standards Committee, and subsequently to the Board, are systematic and well-designed. These ensure that governors are well-informed and are able to hold senior managers to account. Documentation and discussion with governors show their participation in reviewing, challenging and agreeing the objectives and milestones set in the light of the outcomes of the self-assessment, and in monitoring progress towards achieving them.

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