

Thurrock Borough Council

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Local Authority
Thurrock Adult Community College
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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Thurrock Borough Council is a unitary authority situated between London and Essex. Thurrock Adult Community College (TACC; the college) is the adult learning service for the authority. TACC provides courses in adult and community learning, family learning, neighbourhood learning and accredited programmes. In 2009/10 the college delivered over 300 courses to over 2,400 learners which accounted for over 3,000 individual enrolments. The provision is based mainly in Grays Adult Education Centre and in around 40 community venues. In addition the college has a GetOn2GetOn bus delivering information technology provision in the community. Provision is funded by the Skills Funding Agency through the Borough Council.

At the previous full inspection in 2008 the college was graded inadequate overall. At the reinspection in 2009 achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were graded satisfactory and capacity to improve good. Preparation for life and work and family learning were judged to have improved and were satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit including the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effective has the very successful self-assessment process identified during the previous inspection been in continuing to support improvements in the provision?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection described the quality of the self-assessment process and report as very effective. The college continues to develop both well. The process is clearly structured, well embedded and successfully engages staff at all levels. Regular team meetings enable staff to be fully involved in developments, understand their contribution to success and take part in the monitoring of progress. Moderation processes are well established. Curriculum managers develop self-assessment reports which are moderated internally by their peers and externally by the external peer review group. The focussed and comprehensive whole college self-assessment report is moderated by a Beacon college. Curriculum areas have comprehensive quality improvement plans which use a red/amber/green 'traffic light' system to denote progress. Managers review the status of each objective regularly with the vice-principal applying rigorous standards for achievement including demonstrating the benefit to learners. The whole college quality improvement plan is updated but the details of developments are not fully recorded and the college does not effectively capture progress at a strategic level.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has TACC made in improving outcomes for learners and resolving areas of weaker and recently declining performance?

Significant progress

At the time of the reinspection in May 2009 TACC had taken effective action to improve inadequate success rates. However, the significant increase in overall success rates for long courses to 78% in 2008/09 fell back slightly to 77% in 2009/10. The performance of the small number of 16 to 18 year olds was significantly weaker than that of adult learners. The current self-assessment report identifies in detail areas of relative weakness and decline and TACC has taken clear and successful action to ensure significant improvements. Staff development is good and mentoring support, particularly for new and less highly performing teachers, highly effective. All staff have a good understanding of data and use it well to monitor individual learners' progress and overall course performance. Improvements in marketing ensure that learners have a clear and detailed understanding of course requirements. TACC monitors enrolment carefully to make sure learners have appropriate skills for the level of their course. The college has largely transferred its work with 16 to 18 year old learners to other local providers. TACC's data for March 2011 forecasts a significant improvement in the potential maximum overall success rate to 92% compared with a forecast of 78% in March 2010.

Quality of provision

What progress has TACC made in the monitoring and management of learners' progress through individual learning plans? How effectively are teachers using the results of initial assessment to set targets which support learners' progress?

Significant progress

At the time of the previous inspection TACC had adapted individual learning plans to meet the needs of different curriculum areas. However, teachers did not use the plans effectively across all of the provision. TACC has made significant progress in this area. Initial assessment is comprehensive and provides useful information about the range of learners' skills, including their needs for additional support, and their prior achievement. Staff use this information very effectively to set clear and focussed targets to meet individual learner's needs and the objectives of their course. Staff monitor learners' targets regularly and plan this activity carefully into teaching sessions. Teachers and learners use targets very effectively to review progress, celebrate success and clearly identify learners' next steps. The format of individual learning plans effectively meets both the requirements of the course and the needs and interests of the learners. For example, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities can use photographs to show how they have achieved their targets. Senior managers approve the design of all learning plans and review their use every six weeks. Managers and teaching staff work together very effectively to assure and improve quality and consistency and identify staff support needs.

What progress has TACC made in developing systems to monitor and assess learners in non-accredited learning? How effectively is this used to support learners' progress and achievement?

Significant progress

The inspection and reinspection reports of 2008 and 2009 identified the recognition and recording of learners' progress on non-accredited courses as an area for improvement. The 2009 inspection reported that TACC was acting to make improvements and had recently set up a working group to develop an effective system. TACC has now made significant progress in establishing arrangements for recording and monitoring. The working group successfully achieved its brief and completed many actions earlier than planned. Staff teaching on non-accredited courses use individual and group targets in learning plans very effectively. They review each learner's progress regularly against their targets and carefully record the dates on which each target is achieved on the simple and easy to use progress tracking form. Managers have supported the implementation of this process well by good staff development and a peer mentoring scheme. Observations of teaching and learning, which focus on the effectiveness of the recording of learners' progress, provide teachers with constructive feedback and effectively support them to improve.

Leadership and management

What progress has TACC made in improving information advice and guidance for learners? How effectively are quality monitoring systems developing the service?

Reasonable progress

At the time of the previous inspection TACC was responsible for the delivery of the Next Step contract. Inspectors identified concerns about staff qualifications and the monitoring of the quality of the provision. The college no longer holds the contract and is now concentrating on developing the broader provision of information, advice and guidance across the college. TACC has improved its marketing materials and the clarity and detail of course outlines. Courses with more complex requirements now include a pre-course interview ensuring that learners have the necessary skills to succeed and clear expectations about the course requirements. The college delivers a number of short taster courses which effectively signpost progression opportunities. Posters around the college illustrate the learner's journey and are usefully annotated with information, advice and guidance needs. Managers ensure that staff develop an improved understanding of their guidance role and support them effectively to deliver it. The college is developing useful curriculum maps to help learners understand progression routes and staff encourage learners to move on both within the college and to other providers. However, the college does not collect external destination data and links with employers remain underdeveloped. TACC has not established a system to monitor the quality of information advice and guidance.

How effectively is the system for the observation and monitoring of teaching and learning continuing to improve teachers' performance and learners' experience?**Significant progress**

At the time of the previous inspection TACC had established an observation system which had improved teaching and learning across the college to a satisfactory standard. This system continues to be very effectively developed and contributes successfully to quality assurance and quality improvement. Managers and staff understand the purpose and detail of the procedures well and can describe the way in which they are successfully targeted to meet both individual and organisational needs. TACC successfully assures the quality of teaching and learning through graded observations which form part of a system of rigorous performance review. All staff have well managed and regularly monitored personal action plans. The grade profile for teaching and learning is now good across the college and continues to improve. In addition, TACC has established a very effective peer monitoring system. The observations within this system are ungraded and are responsive to teachers' needs and requests. Managers use the analysis of outcomes effectively both in the design of staff development activities for all staff and in the development of individual mentoring. These arrangements support staff well to improve particular aspects of their performance.

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