

Stanmore College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Stanmore College is a smaller than average further education college in the London Borough of Harrow. Courses are provided in all curriculum areas except for construction, engineering and agriculture. Enrolments are highest in: preparation for life and work; business, administration and law; arts, media and publishing; science and mathematics; and, health, public services and care. In 2010/11, there were 1,588 full-time learners of whom 1,384 were aged 16 to 18 and 204 were adults. Some 830 mainly adult learners studied on part-time programmes. Employer-responsive provision accounted for 850 learners. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups was 79% for 16- to 18-year-old learners and 70% for adults.

The previous inspection in December 2010 judged the college's overall effectiveness to be good, as were outcomes for learners, the quality of provision, leadership and management, the capacity to improve, safeguarding arrangements and equality and diversity. Employer-responsive provision in health, public services and care was judged to be outstanding, science and mathematics were good, and literacy and numeracy were found to be inadequate.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made since the previous inspection in developing quality improvement procedures and the self-assessment process?

Reasonable progress

The previous inspection reported that self-assessment and action planning were good overall, and largely resulted in improvements, but targets were not always sufficiently precise. The college now sets detailed targets for all courses, for instance covering learners' attendance, retention, achievement and success rates and these are monitored rigorously. Course reviews, records of teaching observations and learners' views are all used effectively to inform the self-assessment process.

Improvement plans contain relevant actions and targets aiming to tackle weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They introduce procedures for earlier and more stringent assessment of students' work to ensure extensive support is given to students who are underperforming. Curriculum staff now have more accountability for the enrolment of learners and this has given staff a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for the performance of learners. However, it is too early to measure the full impact of these actions on learners' outcomes.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made to improve learners' outcomes since the previous inspection? **Insufficient progress**

The college has maintained high success rates for many courses and the headline success rate for learners of all ages, at all levels, improved marginally in 2010/11. However, the overall progress to improve learners' outcomes is insufficient. Success rates for learners of all ages taking long courses increased at level 2, but decreased at levels 1 and 3. They improved for learners on very short courses, but declined significantly for learners taking short courses. Retention figures dipped between 2009/10 and 2010/11 for learners of all ages and at all levels. For students aged 16 to 18 the decrease was 3.1% and 3.9% at levels 2 and 3 respectively. Overall attendance rates for this group of learners have declined consistently for the past three years, although they have increased for adults.

Vocational courses in the college maintain high success rates and learners continue to make outstanding progress when their previous educational attainment is taken into account. Although the overall pass rates for A levels are high, they are low and falling for many AS courses. Progress based on the previous attainment of AS- and A-level learners is less than satisfactory. There are no significant achievement gaps for learners according to their gender or ethnicity.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made to ensure teaching and learning provide sufficient challenge to more able learners and enable them to achieve higher grades and reach their full potential? **Reasonable progress**

The college has addressed this area for improvement as part of its strategy to stretch and challenge all learners. Having previously considered more narrow approaches to meeting the needs of 'gifted and talented' learners, managers recognised that this aspect of challenge is well managed in most lessons. Consequently, a broader based strategy was adopted to encompass the needs of all learners. The resulting action plan, updated for 2011/12, contains much wider issues than teaching and learning.

The college now offers two qualification courses, the extended project qualification and the certificate in personal effectiveness, to provide tangible additional benefits to learners, but their recent introduction prevents an evaluation of their full impact.

Additionally, a range of 'stretch and challenge' opportunities within the college have been identified and are increasingly promoted to learners. For instance, sporting activities take place that are welcomed by learners with sporting prowess.

What progress has the college made to improve the quality of provision in literacy and numeracy?**Reasonable progress**

The college has a clear programme of improvement for provision in literacy and numeracy which is beginning to have a positive impact. Learners comment positively about the quality of their courses. Managers and teachers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and teachers are very much at the heart of driving forward improvements. Much emphasis has been placed on improving teaching and learning. Improvement is evident but, as the college recognises, much work is still to be done. Consistently good approaches to the use of initial assessment in guiding teaching and learning, in the use of questioning, and in meeting the particular needs of individual learners have to be achieved. Course lengths have been extended to allow for more personalised teaching and learning, and unhelpfully long lessons for GCSE mathematics are now in two parts.

Improvement is most evident in learners' success rates in this curriculum area. The overall success rate for 2010/11 was 76% as compared with 63% the previous year. College data show significant improvement in success rates across a range of literacy and numeracy courses, although success rates declined from 2009/10 in one or two courses. Many success rates are now at, or above, national averages, although a few are still well below. For GCSE mathematics and English the overall proportion of learners gaining high grade passes is still too low compared to national averages.

Leadership and management**What progress has the college made to ensure judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and to ensure improvement actions for teachers resulting from lesson observations are monitored rigorously by managers?****Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection found that the college's lesson observation scheme was effective in helping improvement, but managers did not moderate judgements on the quality of lessons sufficiently or monitor the implementation of identified actions for improvement routinely.

Post inspection, the college has worked well to rectify these issues and to improve further the rigour of the college's scheme for the observation of teaching and learning. The need, and strategy, for improvement was discussed and determined by the strategic management team and other staff, particularly the college's teaching and learning coaches. The latter's role in further improving teaching and learning and supporting teachers has been enhanced.

A new model of observation has been agreed whereby the observation team, including the relevant head of department, will spend a week in each department and will observe all teachers. It is planned that this approach will enable more rigorous observation and moderation of the team's observation outcomes. Additionally, team agreement of actions for improvement of aspects of teaching and

learning should be easier to achieve. Heads of department are crucially placed more at the centre of the model, with clear responsibility for ensuring actions for improvement are implemented and monitored.

During the monitoring visit, inspectors agreed with the grades awarded to lessons in joint observations by college observers.

What progress has the college made to use data effectively to set, monitor and review more detailed targets, particularly actions taken for AS courses and literacy and numeracy programmes? **Significant progress**

The college has made significant progress and now uses data very effectively to review progress routinely at a detailed level. Senior managers have a thoughtful approach to the analysis of data. For example, they have evaluated the changing demographic profile of their students, the effect this may have on their performance and proposed relevant support mechanisms to help students succeed.

Management information data are accurate and readily available through the college's intranet for staff of all levels. Senior and curriculum managers, teachers and tutors have ready access to key performance indicators, including current attendance, punctuality and retention figures for learners. Personal learning plans for students are freely available online and contain very useful and current information on their attendance and punctuality, plus specific and measurable targets to improve their standard of work. Managers monitor the progress of action plans regularly to track progress, doing this particularly well for AS courses and literacy and numeracy provision.

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