

City of Westminster College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

City of Westminster College is a medium-sized general further education college in the London Borough of Westminster. The college operates from two main sites and a number of smaller sites and outreach centres. The college's new purpose-built premises in Paddington Green opened in the January 2011. High numbers of residents in Westminster have no qualifications and many wards have high levels of child poverty, long-term unemployment and poor housing. The college offers courses in 14 of the 15 subject areas and the numbers of learners, especially of learners aged 16 to 18 on full-time programmes, have increased over the past two years. Three quarters of the learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds and almost half of the learners speak a first language other than English. Recruitment to the college's apprenticeship provision has increased markedly over the past 12 months.

At the previous inspection in February 2010, the college's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve were found to be satisfactory. Outcomes for learners were also judged to be satisfactory. Within quality of provision, teaching and learning, meeting the needs and interests of learners and care, guidance and support were all judged to be satisfactory; however, partnership working was judged good. Leadership and management, along with safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity were found to be satisfactory. Engineering, construction and foundations for learning and life were judged to be good. Health and social care and science and mathematics were graded as satisfactory. This report focuses on the key themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving self-assessment and quality improvement?	Reasonable progress
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Over the past two years, the college has thoroughly reviewed and improved the systems for quality improvement and self-assessment. Course reviews, assessment boards and quality monitoring meetings are used to monitor progress against team targets for improvement and staff speak confidently about the positive impact they are having on the quality of provision. Improved management information makes tracking and monitoring learner progress simpler and more accurate. Managers regularly hold curriculum teams to account about the progress individual learners' make. The lesson observation system and the quality of support for teachers has also improved. Over 70 teachers have embarked on supported, small-scale research aimed at improving their professional practice. However, decreasing the large proportion of satisfactory teaching and learning remains a key area for development.

Teachers and learners speak positively about the way in which managers have listened to, and acted upon, learners' views.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in improving outcomes for learners? Reasonable progress

Outcomes for learners have improved over the past three years. In 2010/11 the proportion of learners successfully achieving their qualifications was 79%, just below the national average for similar colleges. However, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on advanced programmes were well below national average. Outcomes for adult learners improved substantially and in 2010/11 were broadly at national averages. The proportion of learners successfully completing their courses in 2010/11 was above national average; however, attainment levels vary across faculties and levels, and managers recognise that improving the consistency of attainment across the college is work in progress. Teachers record and monitor learners' attendance with much greater consistency and follow up absences rigorously. Teachers and managers report that they feel much more accountable and supported in the drive to raise achievements and standards throughout the college. Learners' progression, both to further and higher education and employment, has improved. Teachers and managers attribute this to improved recruitment, advice on enrolment and to the introduction of rigorous introductory programmes for all.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the impact of teaching on learners' learning and ensuring consistently good teaching across the college? Reasonable progress

The college has extensively reviewed and improved the observation and monitoring of teaching and learning. Managers now focus more sharply on learning and the progress learners make. A team of advanced practitioners provides support for curriculum teams and individual teachers to develop and improve. Joint lesson observations and moderation exercises are in place to ensure greater consistency and higher standards. Staff awarded unsatisfactory grades are supported, develop action plans and are re-observed through the performance management system. Current observation data show that the proportion of lessons graded as unsatisfactory has declined from 5% in 2010/11 to around 2% in the current year. As a result of more emphasis on learning and a more consistent approach from observers, the proportion of good or better lessons declined to around 60% in 2010/11 and current data would suggest a similar, slightly improved, proportion in 2011/12. Managers are confident that post-observation action plans are implemented well and recognise that planning for individual learning, embedding of equality and diversity, better use of directed questions and too much teacher input are areas for improvement.

Around 70 teachers have identified various aspects of their professional practice that they would like to improve and have agreed to try to develop new methods to do so. Observation, group meetings, individual support meetings and peer observations are helping them to refine their ideas and to try to measure the impact of the changes on learners' outcomes and motivation.

What progress has been made in securing improved and measurable targets for learners and in training staff to help learners set appropriate targets? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, the college has implemented training and updated programmes to support teachers both in developing individual learner targets and in supporting learners to set their own appropriate targets. Managers have introduced a calendar of activities which includes the monitoring of individual learning plans. Learners' individual learning plans and progress reviews now form a key part of the college's quality monitoring system. The grading of tutorials now includes criteria linked to target setting and the extent to which learners actively participate in the process. Learners' individual learning plans include subject and aspirational targets, as well as current progress and any risk factors such as poor attendance or slow completion of work. Governors now monitor predicted success rates across the college, based on individual learning plans, and tutors introduce learners to target setting during the induction process. Learners are aware of their targets and they find them a useful part of the tutorial processes, particularly for keeping up to date with work and to keep on track with their assignments or course work. More confident learners are able to set their own targets and make good use of the college intranet to monitor their own progress, but not all learners have reached that stage.

What progress has been made in increasing provision for apprentices and foundation level courses for 16- to 18-year-olds? Significant progress

The provision for learners at entry and foundation level, and for apprentices, has increased significantly since the 2009/10 inspection. Currently, 412 learners aged 16 to 18 are on long qualifications, along with around 130 on Foundation Learning programmes. The college has introduced a range of courses in sport and leisure; art, media and publishing; engineering; construction; applied science; and, information and communication technology (ICT). Outcomes for learners on these programmes have improved and a high proportion progress to further study either within the college or to other local further education colleges. The number of learners on apprenticeships has increased markedly. In 2010/11, 113 apprentices were on programme and in the current year there are 244. College managers work effectively with the London Apprentice Company, the National Apprenticeship Scheme and local employers to develop opportunities for apprentices. In addition, teachers work with a number of hostels for the homeless in the local community and 160 part-time learners are supported. These learners develop independent living skills, basic literacy at foundation and entry level and take a range of other accredited work-

related programmes. Fresh Start courses for young people not in education, employment or training have also recruited well. Numbers participating in re-engagement programmes leading to the Certificate in Vocational Studies tripled in 2010/11. The college has recently been awarded a £1.2m contract to manage the Supporting Training for Work for Young People programme across London.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in systematically developing the promotion of equality and diversity? **Reasonable progress**

The college has identified three areas of focus: promotion in the classroom; visible celebration of equality and diversity across the college sites; and, monitoring of learners' outcomes. More than 95% of teaching and support staff have attended relevant training events, including events focusing on classroom practice. They have attended themed topics of their choice such as exploring faiths and transgender awareness. The college has included aspects of equality and diversity awareness for learners at induction and throughout the year during tutorials, where topics such as Black History Month and International Women's Day are included. The college is now able to interrogate its data at course level to identify any shortfalls in outcomes by different groups and has taken action where appropriate. The approach to the promotion of equality and diversity through classroom activity varies significantly and all learners interviewed valued the emphasis in the college on respect for others. However, not all learners could readily recall examples of active promotion, whilst others could provide clear examples of activities that had broadened their understanding. The college has yet to evaluate the impact of its approach and the extent to which all learners are developing their knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity, and are being prepared for their destinations after leaving college.

What progress has been made in using management information and data more effectively to drive improvements? **Significant progress**

The college has successfully improved the accuracy of its management information. Managers, curriculum teams and support staff now have ready access to accurate and up-to-date information on the attendance and progress of individual learners. This information, from course teams, tutors and heads of school, is now used to inform the decisions taken at assessment boards about predicted grades and learners' progress. Learners at risk can be identified quickly and actions at curriculum level agreed to minimise risk. Members of staff have been trained to interrogate the data and managers and governors now have a more accurate view of the college's position at an earlier stage in the year. Heads of school set appropriately different yet challenging targets for their courses and national data are used more effectively to evaluate improvements. Data related to performance by ethnicity, age and/or gender are not yet routinely used at assessment boards, although staff can

interrogate the data at course level if required. Fewer learners leave the courses early and success rates have improved over the past two years.

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