

Greenwich Community College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Greenwich Community College is a medium-sized further education college which operates on five main sites and in a large number of community venues across the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The college offers programmes in 15 subject areas and provides academic, vocational and informal education and training to young people and adults, from pre-entry to higher education programmes. In 2010/11, the college enrolled 11,559 students, an increase of 14% on the previous year.

The most recent inspection report was published in July 2010. The college was graded satisfactory in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management and safeguarding. Equality and diversity were judged to be good. Of the four subject areas inspected, leisure, travel and tourism and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) were graded as good. Science and mathematics and literacy and numeracy were graded as satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in improving the process of action planning linked to self-assessment?

Reasonable progress

Previously, the college's self-assessment was judged to be satisfactory, with key aspects over graded. Since the start of the 2011/12 academic year, the new senior management team has introduced fundamental changes to the monitoring of performance. These affect the monitoring of programme, course, teaching and learning, and student performance. All areas of performance review have been fully established and lead to regular meetings at all levels. The active use of reliable and timely data has much enhanced the rigour of performance monitoring. Review meetings are characterised by vigorous challenge of weaker performance, and close monitoring of action plans. Senior managers quickly overcome impediments to the improvement of the quality of provision. Staff are now fully engaged in the quality improvement process and recognise the beneficial effect on the student experience. Senior managers have introduced self-assessment standards to reduce any inconsistency of approach. However, course review action plan targets vary too much. Some targets are very clear as to what success would look like, whereas others are not. The college acknowledges this, and is working towards further improving the availability of data to increase its effectiveness at monitoring performance.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made to address declining retention rates on preparation for life and work long courses? Insufficient progress

This area of the college's long-course provision is significant, and over the past three years the retention rate has declined. It is now well below the national average for similar colleges. The college has taken action this year to improve retention rates. For example, it has reduced significantly the number of students enrolled this year onto a poorly performing personal and social development course. Retention rates for this group have improved by four percentage points. Other actions include the introduction of learning support assistants into lessons from February this year, and early indications of the support offered are positive. Future improvement plans include stricter entry criteria for ESOL students wishing to progress to a higher level and the introduction of more courses directly linked to subject-specific vocational training.

The college has recognised that current practice in the preparation for life and work provision has not been sufficiently effective at meeting the needs of all students. The college's draft proposal for an 'English and maths skills policy' clearly outlines its concerns for this area and how it intends to improve the quality of the provision. However, overall in-year retention rates have remained the same as last year and retention rates for adult literacy and ESOL programmes for students aged 16 to 18 have declined significantly.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving the rigour of the observation of teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

A relatively new senior management team has strengthened the lesson observation system to make it more rigorous. This was a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. The observation team is led well by a reflective manager who has carried out thoughtful analyses of the outcomes of the lesson observations. In addition, following extensive and successful professional development, the now slimmed-down observation team is more confident and consistent in its judgements and in identifying and challenging poor practice. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and areas for improvement identified by college observers in joint lesson observations.

Observation records show that teachers are now using a wider range of learning activities, referring more students to additional support services and integrating information and learning technology (ILT) more effectively into lessons. The college is in the process of supporting some teachers to improve the way in which they check learning in lessons. Morale is good in the observation team and staff are confident that moderation procedures are effective in ensuring a consistently high standard of judgements. However, the team has identified that it is less confident in

judging outstanding teaching and learning, and the college plans to address this through further training later in the year.

What progress has the college made in improving the quality of teaching and learning through action planning following observation and sharing of best practice?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, a key area for improvement was the need to disseminate best practice in teaching and learning more effectively. Since then, this has been much improved and internal teaching and learning observations now identify an increase in good or better lessons, along with a realistic assessment that around 5% of lessons are inadequate. Clear procedures are in place to provide support for teachers whose lessons were judged to be satisfactory, and both support and performance management are in place for those whose lessons were graded as unsatisfactory. College records show that some staff have responded positively to the support and have improved their practice. Where this is not the case, the college has acted appropriately.

Teaching staff have confidence in the current observation system and consider it to be supportive rather than punitive. They spoke confidently about the rigour of the judgements and the way in which the support provided in setting meaningful targets has helped them to become more reflective as practitioners. The college now encourages curriculum teams to discuss successful teaching and learning approaches at team meetings, and professional development sessions have focused on 'stretch and challenge', effective starter activities and identifying outstanding teaching and learning.

What progress has the college made in improving the setting of challenging targets that support students to remain on programme?

Reasonable progress

The college has reviewed this key area for improvement identified at the previous inspection and, following a pilot programme, it will introduce a new and improved system for September 2012. The current system is a hybrid of paper-based reviews and targets and an electronic system, and has resulted in a larger proportion of students being identified this year as needing learning support or extra help to make better progress. In-year retention has also increased. Tutorial review records show more effective communication between teaching staff, students and support services. However, the quality of individual learning plan targets remains too variable. Some reviews contain sensible quantitative targets, along with clear evidence of completion and monitoring, whilst others are too aspirational and fail to diagnose what needs to be done. Managers are aware of this and are providing training for teachers and support staff in developing target-setting skills among both staff and students.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in improving the use of data about students' progress in order to tackle issues of underperformance as they arise?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, a key area for improvement was the use of data to monitor students' performance. By the start of this academic year the college had much improved its data systems, and the monitoring of students' progress is now more rigorous with clearer lines of accountability. This has led to staff being significantly more aware of students' performance. Teachers are more able to recognise trends in weaker performance quickly, and to take appropriate action to support students. For example, at the start of the year a 'back-on-track' project was introduced to offer teachers the opportunity to nominate students who were demonstrating serious signs of non-achievement, and to ensure that they receive additional and dedicated specialist support. Of the 103 students put forward, 94% have been retained. The success of this programme has prompted the college to adopt the same approach for a much larger group of students for the following year.

The impact of the improved monitoring of students' progress has been an overall increase in student retention and adult attendance rates. However, attendance rates for students aged 16 to 18 remain static.

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