

Knowsley Community College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Elaine Clinton HMI

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Address: Rupert Road
Roby
Liverpool
Merseyside
L36 9TD

Telephone number: 0151 477 5780

Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Knowsley Community College (KCC) is a medium-sized general further education college. It operates from two sites, in Roby and Kirkby, and also offers courses for adults in the community and on employers' premises. Most students are from a White British heritage, reflecting the local population. Knowsley is one of the most deprived areas in the country and levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth, are higher than regional and national averages.

Ofsted inspectors conducted a monitoring visit in October/November 2012 to explore the progress being made against the recommendations of the last inspection in February 2012. At that inspection capacity to improve and the quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. Overall effectiveness, leadership and management, and outcomes for learners were judged to be inadequate. Of the curriculum areas inspected, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and visual, performing arts and media were judged to be satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy, and business, administration and law were judged to be inadequate.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit which were areas for improvement at the last inspection.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in making self-assessment and quality assurance more rigorous?

Significant Progress

Since the last inspection, KCC has made significant progress in improving the rigour and accuracy of self-assessment and quality-assurance processes. The Principal and the newly appointed Deputy Principal have instigated a significant number of interventions focused on improving quality assurance throughout the college. Data are now more reliable and readily available and consequently the effectiveness of performance monitoring is much improved. Good use is being made of these improved data by the newly formed performance review group to provide regular reports to the governing body. A wide range of professional development training has been delivered to staff. Staff appraisal and performance management are now more rigorous and target orientated. Consequently the monitoring of performance at all levels has significantly improved.

The revised self-assessment process focuses on course and section-level performance very effectively. The report is shorter, more succinct, rich in judgements and supported by clear and detailed evidence. It includes good use of management information, including individual course performance tables that are graded using strict criteria. KCC now uses a wide range of meetings at subject, area and

organisation level to review quality more rigorously. Managers have very effectively devolved responsibility and accountability for each and every learner to subject level.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has the college made in improving learners' outcomes since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

College interim data for 2011/12 indicate that the college has made reasonable progress in improving learners' outcomes since the last inspection. The college's overall headline success rate has increased by 6% points and is comparable to the national average. The overall success rate for all learners taking long qualifications has improved to just below the national average and the overall retention rate has improved by 6% points. Achievement rates have been maintained at 92%. At subject area level, four areas maintained their previous success rates including one which is high at 90%. Eight areas improved their success rates by between 3% points and 26% points. Two areas declined although in one of these, construction, the learning programmes leading to qualifications are being phased out. Value added data for 2012 indicate that learners who complete their AS-level course make significantly better progress than is expected of them.

Revised college procedures for monitoring individual course performance are now more rigorous and include both weekly and monthly review meetings. Staff have an improved understanding of management information and have easier access to the information to support them in reviewing their own provision. Better use of targets focuses attention on the impact of early leavers on success rates. Information on individual learner support needs is shared systematically to ensure support is delivered earlier.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has the college made to improve the quality of teaching and learning through setting higher standards for teaching and learning, simplifying the arrangements for observing lessons and providing training to ensure all lessons challenge learners to make good progress?

Significant progress

The need for more lessons to be of the highest quality, to improve the pace and quality of lessons, and improve the use of information and learning technology (ILT) were all identified as key areas for improvement in the last inspection report. Since then, extensive training and frequent team meetings have resulted in a significant culture change where all teachers are ambitious to be outstanding, where poor teaching is not tolerated and the sharing of best practice is a continuous process. Morale is good and teachers are passionate about their teaching.

As a result of the significant training and support, internal teaching and learning observations now identify an increase in good or better lessons, along with a realistic

assessment that around 3% of lessons are inadequate. The most recent observation records show that teachers are using a much wider range of learning activities and making better use of initial assessment and ILT in teaching, learning and assessment. Assessment practice is now more consistent and generally learners are being provided with more useful feedback that helps them improve. Workplace learners are benefiting from more useful and regular reviews that clearly focus on achieving their qualification in the planned time.

The college now encourages curriculum teams to discuss successful teaching and learning approaches at weekly team meetings. Professional development sessions have focused on activities to challenge more able learners, effective starter activities and identifying the features of outstanding teaching and learning. Clear procedures are in place to provide support for teachers whose lessons are judged to be satisfactory. Both support and performance management are in place for those whose lessons are graded as inadequate or requiring improvement. College records show that most staff have responded positively to the support and have improved their practice. Where this is not the case, the college has acted appropriately.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in utilising available support and the sharing of best practice to improve the quality of provision?

Reasonable progress

The college has made good use of a Skills Funding Agency case study group to monitor its progress and effectiveness in implementing the post-inspection action plan. Monthly meetings provide the Principal and Deputy Principal with good support, challenge and feedback. Detailed progress reports focus appropriately on teaching, learning and the quality of the curriculum, and make good use of management information to report, monitor and improve outcomes for learners.

The college has implemented a weekly meetings structure to support improvement in teaching and learning. Staff teams are now working very effectively together to share ideas and improve practice. They have confidence to discuss issues and challenges with colleagues. Close links with outstanding providers are providing staff with support and training in key areas. These have been beneficial in sharing practices to improve the rigour of self-assessment, and the quality of teaching and learning. Staff report that this learning has helped them to improve specific classroom activities such as the use of questioning during lessons to monitor progress and ensure engagement in learning. The most recent records of lesson observations and learning walks, as well as the observations carried out during the monitoring visit, support this assertion.

What progress has the college made in improving provision in literacy and numeracy?**Reasonable Progress**

Since the last inspection, managers have implemented many actions to improve the quality of this provision which was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Central to this has been the careful monitoring of learners' progress and regular observations of teaching and learning. As a result, overall success rates increased significantly in 2011/12 and were just in line with the national rate. Although retention improved in 2011/12 it remains just below the national rate.

Teaching is improving in this area and lessons now more effectively develop learners' confidence and independence in functional mathematics and problem solving. In a few lessons, opportunities are missed to contextualise functional skills to make learning more relevant to students. The teaching of learners undertaking functional skills now takes place in discrete curriculum groups within vocational areas and is fully supported by functional skills champions. Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills takes place earlier in the academic year, is more thorough and is ensuring that learners are placed at the correct level. College evidence indicates that those learners identified as needing support are receiving this more promptly than in previous years.

How much progress has the college made in improving the quality of business, administration and law?**Reasonable progress**

An energised staff team is rectifying the weaknesses identified at the last inspection which judged provision in business, administration and law to be inadequate. Actions are sharply focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising success rates. Success rates on most courses have improved and were significantly above the national rate in 2011/12, although pockets of poor performance remain at intermediate and advanced level. The college has identified the reasons for this poor performance and has clear processes in place to address them.

Managers have invested considerable resources to improve the standard of teaching and learning. They monitor students' attendance and punctuality rates rigorously and these are improving. Staff are now much more aware of targets and are making more effective use of management information to ensure the success of the learner. Communication within the department has greatly improved and coordination between the two college sites has similarly improved. Staff have continued to improve links with employers to enhance the curriculum and provide an increased range of work placements.

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