

# The City of Liverpool College

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130487

**Name of lead inspector:** Bryan Davies HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 16 October 2013

**Type of provider:** General further education college

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## Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

### Context and focus of visit

The college is the only general further education college in the city of Liverpool and was formerly known as Liverpool Community College. It has six campuses throughout the city, each of which has a specialist focus; for example, A levels, service industries, arts, engineering, and business. The main centre is the Learning Exchange in Roscoe Street, which has the college's main learning resource centre, student services and leisure facilities as well as teaching accommodation.

Around a third of all 16 to 18-year-olds in the city study at the college. At the time of the last inspection in February 2013 there were approximately 6,000 full-time students, 5,000 part-time students, 2,000 community learners and around 1,000 apprentices. At that inspection, outcomes for learners, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the effectiveness of leadership and management, and overall effectiveness were judged to be inadequate. Since the inspection the college has been part of Ofsted's pilot project to support and challenge colleges to improve. The college has had four visits from Her Majesty's Inspectors.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the reinspection monitoring visit and the progress the college has made with the recommendations identified by inspectors at the time of the inspection.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

**What progress has the college made in improving quality assurance systems to monitor improvements and ensuring actions have a positive impact?**

**Reasonable progress**

Managers quickly implemented a post-inspection action plan which focused strongly on improving the learners' experience by improving teaching, learning and assessment.

The process for observing and evaluating teaching, learning and assessment has been thoroughly reviewed and more rigorous criteria have been implemented. Lesson observations are now scheduled early in the academic year to enable the college to judge more quickly the impact of improvement activities and identify further actions for individual staff and for the college as a whole. During the reinspection monitoring visit, inspectors and college observers generally agreed the main strengths and areas for improvement from the joint lesson observations. However, in two instances the sampled reports of lesson observations did not provide compelling written evidence to support the grade awarded by the observer. These reports were sampled prior to being moderated.

The college has introduced the use of short 'walk through' observations, frequent auditing of the quality of key documentation, and curriculum review visits focusing on the quality of the learners' experience to provide wider evidence for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The draft self-assessment report is honest and self-critical. The college identifies that it must further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment during the current year. Governors provide robust challenge and regularly monitor the progress in the post-inspection action plan. They take particular interest in how the college is meeting the needs of the city and in apprenticeships.

### **Outcomes for learners**

#### **How effective have the actions taken by the college been in improving success rates on vocational courses? Reasonable Progress**

Managers took rapid action after the inspection to improve the quality of the students' experience. Successful actions ensured that the students on vocational courses, the majority of students, who were at college in February, completed their courses and achieved their qualifications. Attendance monitoring improved and actions taken by staff improved students' attendance and punctuality. Success rates on vocational courses improved by 3% and on functional skills by 1%. The success rate of apprentices who complete within the agreed timeframe has also improved slightly. The number of students who progressed to higher-level courses at the college increased significantly.

In September 2013, considerably improved advice, guidance and recruitment processes have led to fewer students transferring to other courses or leaving the college in the first six weeks of their courses.

New processes enable tutors to identify students' support needs and those at risk, earlier, so that intervention can and does take place more quickly. Students have challenging targets and personal tutors monitor students' progress regularly. The quality team recently introduced electronic individual learning plans to ensure targets are in place and are appropriate.

#### **How effective have the actions taken by the college been in improving success rates on advanced-level courses? Insufficient Progress**

At the time of the inspection in February 2013, many students had already left the college and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment resulted in many students making insufficient progress. As a consequence, pass rates and value added for advanced-level students completing their studies in 2013 remained low.

However, students who started their courses in September 2013 have experienced an improved start to the year. Improved advice and guidance, including 'Right Course Right Choice', have ensured that students are on the correct courses or that

they have transferred to more appropriate courses. Early indications are that attendance and punctuality of advanced-level students are improving and fewer students have withdrawn when compared with the same period last year.

Tutors are now setting students clear and challenging targets, regular homework and monthly tests under examination conditions. Personal and academic support has improved. Tutors' monitoring of individual students' progress identifies students who are 'at risk' and they initiate support. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these actions on significantly improving success rates and value added.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

#### **What progress has the college made in improving teaching, learning and assessment? Reasonable progress**

Managers revised the staffing needs and invested in a dedicated learning manager, curriculum team leaders and additional advanced lecturers to provide a strong focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment in subject areas.

The college has implemented a number of key actions to improve teaching, learning and assessment, including a revised approach to planning lessons, a more rigorous process for the timely identification of learners' support needs, more comprehensive student-support arrangements and a new virtual learning environment to better support and enable independent learning by students. Induction has been thoroughly revised and students' feedback expresses high levels of satisfaction with the new process.

Teachers participated in a comprehensive programme of generic training covering the main areas of improvement and recommendations identified by inspectors. In the current year newly introduced weekly staff development sessions, the 'Learning Launchpad', focus on staff needs and issues identified through quality assurance activities. Staff welcome these changes but it is too early to judge the full impact of them.

Early analysis from this year's activities which have monitored the quality of teaching, learning and assessment indicate significant improvements in some areas; for example, the use of active learning and information and learning technology, including the virtual learning environment, in lessons. However, the use of differentiation to stretch and challenge all learners in lessons and the use of different assessment methods to check learners' understanding in lessons remain areas for further improvement.

New processes to ensure more consistent and effective feedback on students' assignment work have had a positive impact in some curriculum areas.

## Leadership and management

**What progress has been made to ensure that management information is up to date, understood and used by managers at all levels to drive improvements?**

**Reasonable Progress**

The college has invested in additional experienced staff to strengthen the existing management-information team. The college has invested in electronic systems to monitor students' progress and attendance. Additional systems now help to assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment better by analysing the results of lesson observations and identifying common themes.

Staff have been trained to use the recently introduced electronic individual learning plan, which is intended to enable staff, students and managers to monitor students' progress more effectively. Students value this system and second-year students are much better informed of their progress so far. Managers have high expectations of the effectiveness of this system but it is too early to judge its impact.

Management information is now timely and reliable and is used by senior managers to monitor performance. Senior managers set challenging targets at curriculum level, and curriculum leaders are held to account in performance reviews. Curriculum leaders have been trained to set targets at course level and use targets to bring about improvement. Progress-review meetings to confirm targets are scheduled and have been held for all courses.

**What progress has the college made in implementing robust performance-management systems?**

**Reasonable progress**

A number of staff, including managers, have changed their roles or left the college as a result of the implementation of more robust performance management. The revised staff-appraisal system has a stronger focus on staff meeting the expected behaviours of the college. Managers set staff clear, measurable targets linked to improving students' performance. The link between consistent underperformance in observed lessons and the capability and disciplinary procedures have been made clearer.

Trained observers use the revised observation of teaching, learning and assessment process effectively. No-notice observations and more rigorous criteria provide a clearer picture of the quality experienced by students. To increase the pace of improvement, the time period between the observation of a teacher, the support and development provided, and re-observation to measure improvement has been reduced.

The process for reviewing the performance of courses and individual subjects has been strengthened, with a sharper focus given to a number of key performance indicators and the achievement of targets during performance review meetings.

Managers use the very new 'notice-to-improve' process to shine a spotlight and provide appropriate support and challenge on those courses or subjects which cause concern. However, it is too early in the current year to judge what impact these changes will have on the college's success rates.

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