

# Lewisham Southwark College

## First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130415

**Name of lead inspector:** Jo Parkman HMI

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

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to Lewisham Southwark College following publication of the inspection report on 30 March 2015, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. The inspection in February 2015 was a reinspection as the college was first judged to be inadequate in November 2013.

Lewisham Southwark College provides a vocational curriculum and the majority of its learners are adults. The purpose of this visit was to establish what initial steps the college has taken to improve provision in response to the previous inspection and to set priorities for improvement.

### Themes

#### Improvement in the college's financial position

The inspection in February 2015 identified the college's precarious financial position as a key factor affecting its ability to improve swiftly. Previous senior managers were overly optimistic about the college's ability to recruit, in particular, 16- to 18-year-old learners and its potential to expand. This resulted in the college continuing to forecast budgets based on an inflated assumption of the funding it would attract. A desire, which persisted over a considerable period of time, to maintain staffing numbers, in particular with regards to support staff, has hindered the college's ability to achieve financial stability. Staffing costs as a proportion of the college's income are some 12 percentage points higher than other general further education colleges. Other factors, such as the closing of the Bermondsey centre and the re-development at Waterloo leading to disruption for learners, have contributed to falling numbers of learners. However, these actions were essential to provide high quality teaching facilities for learners in the longer term and remove out-dated and inferior teaching accommodation. Previous plans to address the finances of the college were not sufficiently rigorous. The interim Principal, senior managers and new financial director are now taking robust action to draw up a realistic plan for financial recovery and organisational review.

#### Priorities for improvement

The Principal and senior management team must:

- implement a recovery plan for finances immediately and ensure financial forecasting is achievable and realistic
- set achievable and realistic targets for the recruitment of 16- to 18-year-old learners to ensure that the college is not over-resourced, particularly with regard to staffing

- carry out market research to ensure that the curriculum offered meets the needs of the college's target group for recruitment, and to ensure that the college has positioned itself correctly in a competitive London market for learner recruitment
- research and identify the reasons behind the significant drop in learner numbers for 16- to 18-year-olds and consider whether it is possible to increase learner numbers by addressing the problems identified
- ensure learners' experience of education and training, and teaching resources, are not harmed by any financial cuts which may be necessary to help the financial recovery
- rationalise the number and type of staff to ensure that there is the correct balance between teaching and non-teaching staff
- develop and implement effective strategies to maintain and improve staff morale while the college takes the steps necessary to return to financial stability.

### **Improvement in curriculum planning to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of employers and effectively helps learners find sustained employment**

The college has employed a consultancy to investigate the match between its curriculum, the local market and employers' needs. This research has proved that the curriculum is offering the type of qualifications likely to lead to employment and fill skills gaps. However, the college has now recognised that, although the offer was appropriate to local needs, it did not take account of the starting points of learners sufficiently. In many cases the lowest level offered was level 2, for learners for whom level 1 would have been more appropriate. Overall, the curriculum did not offer enough stepping stones, or facilitate the progress of those learners who might find a level 2 qualification too challenging as a starting point. The college has a new curriculum plan for September 2015 which includes much better planned progression routes and more options for learners starting out on a vocational path.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers and teaching staff should fully implement the new processes for initial advice and guidance and enrolment, to ensure that learners are recruited onto courses where they have an excellent chance of success, and where the demands of the qualification are appropriate given their starting points.
- Managers should rigorously scour the 2013/14 qualification success reports and ensure that any underperformance linked to an unsuitable curriculum has been identified and remedied.
- Managers and teachers should embed financial and digital literacy into both the vocational curriculum and enrichment activities, to aid learners' development of skills for employment, and to support entrepreneurship and new business start-up to help regenerate the local economy.
- Managers should develop and strengthen the college's links with employers to benefit learners through work experience and other

initiatives, such as mock interviews, mentoring and contributions to assignment work.

### **Improvement in learners' attendance and punctuality**

Poor punctuality and attendance were recurrent themes at both the previous inspection and the inspection in 2013 at which the college was first judged to be inadequate. Although the college has protocols in place for addressing poor punctuality, these were not being applied consistently by all staff. Too often poor attendance meant that teachers struggled to teach classes effectively due to the proportion of learners who had missed significant numbers of sessions. This caused groups to fracture, and the mix of abilities to become unmanageable. It is imperative that senior managers find effective strategies which allow learners access to learning and take account of their individual challenges and difficulties around attending regularly. Since the inspection, managers have now been tasked with removing barriers to attendance and have taken action such as changing start times and introducing flexible arrangements for learners.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Staff involved in recruiting and enrolling learners must ensure that initial advice and guidance includes sufficient focus on attendance and punctuality and identifies learners' barriers to prompt and regular attendance.
- Teachers should ensure that local flexible attendance arrangements, such as swapping sessions during the week, are captured through management information systems to facilitate a more accurate record of attendance.
- Teachers and tutors should put strategies in place to identify learners at risk of attending poorly early in their course and plan interventions to support them in a timely and effective way.
- Teachers should ensure that learners' access to virtual learning is planned and monitored effectively as part of their individual learning plans.
- Teachers should identify poor classroom participation by individual learners and pass this information on to tutors immediately so that they can address this promptly with learners, and obtain vital information on how well teaching and learning are meeting learners' needs.
- Teachers should ensure that strategies for dealing with poor punctuality are applied consistently and that late arrivals do not disrupt the learning of punctual learners.

### **Improvement in teaching and learning to enable all learners to make the best possible progress no matter what their ability**

Inspectors identified significant variations in the quality of teaching and assessment throughout the college, much caused by the erratic attendance of learners and the disruption caused by learners arriving late to sessions. Senior managers have recognised that inconsistency in the quality of teaching is linked strongly to

inconsistencies in the quality of curriculum management. In some cases, college observers, who were members of the curriculum team, were overly generous in their judgement about the quality of teaching. Tensions between the desire to maintain good working relations within small teams and accurately identify improvement needed in teaching hindered the effectiveness of the lesson observation system. Since the inspection, senior managers have implemented a new approach so that observations of teaching and learning are carried out by a cross-college team. Within teams, a much more supportive and developmental approach is now being taken to observing teachers.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers should identify weaker and stronger curriculum management and ensure that the good practice of more effective managers is recognised and promoted to achieve a more consistent standard across all subject areas.
- Senior managers should set clear expectations for curriculum managers and ensure accountability, while providing effective support and staff development for weaker managers.
- Managers should continue to develop the coaching programme and strategies for robust management of teachers' performance, and must communicate clearly to teachers that inconsistent or poor quality teaching is not acceptable.
- Managers must develop teachers' ability to plan effective sessions which meet the needs of all learners.
- Managers must ensure that teachers understand how to set effective, meaningful and achievable targets for learning during sessions and encourage learners to reflect on their learning and contribute to setting their own targets.
- Managers must develop and embed strategies and protocols to allow learners to catch up outside of the classroom rather than challenging teachers to teach mixed ability groups as a result of poor attendance.
- Managers must ensure that teachers are confident to use interactive learning technology, where appropriate, to enhance teaching, and develop cross college protocols for the use of mobile phones and other technology during sessions.
- Managers should continue to develop the good work started in supporting teachers with the 'Prevent' agenda and ensure teachers have the confidence to challenge learners and address any inappropriate behaviour.
- Managers should ensure that teachers have high expectations of learners' behaviour and set standards that reflect those expected by employers, including ensuring that learners are ready to learn and model industry standards, particularly during vocational practical sessions.

### **Improvement in outcomes for learners and in particular for young people on study programmes, including ensuring success in English and mathematics qualifications**

Poor provision in English and mathematics was identified by inspectors in November 2013, and inspectors found that the college had failed to rectify this at the reinspection in February 2015. Success rates for 16- to 18-year-old learners on study programmes and adults on substantial qualifications were well below rates for similar providers in 2013/14. Senior managers have identified that success rates for adults declined because of an inappropriate curriculum, and have taken steps to plan a better curriculum designed to give adults a better chance of success. Since the inspection, managers have taken action to improve the coherence of the strategy for developing learners' English and mathematical skills across all ages and levels. Two new posts have been created, and the senior management team envisages that these new heads of English and mathematics will ensure an effective cross-college approach to developing these essential skills. The new English and mathematics team is enthusiastic and welcomes the high profile this area of work is now receiving. The team is embracing the challenge of raising achievement and learners' aspirations, but there is much work to do to ensure this initial enthusiasm results in significant progress and improvement in this area of the college's work.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers must take immediate and effective action to improve the provision of English and mathematics across all of the college's work.
- Managers must ensure that the newly appointed heads of English and mathematics implement a successful cross-college approach to improvement, including re-establishing a working team to maintain impetus.
- Teachers must emphasise the importance of English and mathematics to learners and model an enthusiastic approach to these subjects to motivate and inspire learners.
- Managers must strive to reduce the use of agency staff and ensure that the college recruits sufficient qualified English and mathematics teachers, and that these teachers teach to high standards.
- Managers must ensure that vocational teachers have the skills and resources they need to embed English and mathematics in their teaching confidently and effectively.
- Teachers should research and implement good practice, both from within the college and externally, and use team teaching where appropriate.
- Managers should ensure that English and mathematics classes do not contain mixed levels of ability to the point where it is impossible for teachers to manage them effectively.
- Managers must ensure that the initial assessment of English and mathematics for those learners who have not achieved a grade C or above at GCSE enables teachers to plan effectively to meet the needs of both those learners already close to a grade C, and those learners who need to make much more progress.

- Managers must ensure that teaching staff adhere to the college's new criteria for English and mathematics skills as part of the entrance requirement to vocational courses at different levels.

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