

Lewisham Southwark College

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Jo Parkman HMI

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Address: Lewisham Southwark College
Lewisham Way
London
SE4 1UT

Telephone number: 020 8692 0353

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection 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 re-inspection 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.

Themes

Strengthening leadership and governance through securing highly able permanent post-holders in key positions

Since the last monitoring visit the new Principal has taken up her post and three new vice-principals have been appointed. These new post-holders bring with them a wealth of experience from good and outstanding colleges and are well placed to bring about improvement. Senior leaders and governors have now completed the organisational review and the actions taken have successfully reduced the previously high staffing costs and brought the college in line with similar colleges. Senior leaders focused the review firmly on reducing costs whilst improving managerial and teaching capacity. Following the review and a voluntary redundancy scheme, the college now has a more capable team of teachers.

Staff have now been appointed to other key management roles, such as the head of teacher education and development, and a sensible and streamlined organisational structure is in place. The new posts have been created to ensure that senior managers have sufficient capacity to remedy successfully the very significant areas for improvement identified at the last two full inspections. The interim Principal and newly appointed Principal worked together over a period of more than two months to ensure a smooth and successful transition between leaders. This lengthy handover period, supported by several weeks of joint working between the new and interim vice-principals, has led to the rapid establishment of a new senior management team that already knows and understands the challenges the college faces in order to substantially improve the quality of its provision. Although realistic about the scale of the task ahead, the new leaders and senior managers have brought a new energy to the college. They are already establishing a different culture in which staff, while being much more responsible and accountable for success in their areas of work, are also allowed the freedom to make the changes they deem necessary and given the support to achieve change.

The board of governors has undergone significant change in the last year; it has been reduced to 15 governors, of whom all but two are relatively new in post. The governing body now has the skills and experience it needs to provide a good level of

challenge to the senior management team. The new governors are showing a high level of determination to bring about improvement at the college, both in terms of their engagement during board meetings and their willingness to play a part in the college's day-to-day activities.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Ensuring that the curriculum offered meets the needs of the college's target group for recruitment and identifying the reasons behind the significant drop in learner numbers for 16- to 18-year-olds

The senior management team now has a good understanding of the reasons behind the significant drop in the number of learners aged 16 to 18 who choose to study at the college. Nearby academy schools are increasingly offering a vocational curriculum; the college must improve the quality of its provision significantly to compete successfully. The senior management team has now reviewed its targets for recruitment and set much more realistic and achievable targets to avoid the financial penalty of under recruitment.

The last monitoring visit identified the need to carry out a full review of success rates to identify weak areas of the curriculum, and managers have now completed this successfully. The interim Principal engaged the help of consultants to carry out extensive research to determine whether the college was meeting the needs of the local economy and employers, and to understand better the potential to recruit learners from different boroughs where transport made this feasible. This included a match of potential learners' aspirations with local job opportunities. This work has proved very valuable and has helped the college to arrive at a curriculum which is based on evidence and research. Both the content and the structure of the curriculum have been reviewed and improved. For example, lower level qualifications have been introduced in some curriculum areas to provide stepping stones for learners and allow them to develop their skills and knowledge in a more progressive way. The senior leadership team has taken a well-considered approach to curriculum design, including looking at the strengths and opportunities provided by its different centres across London.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Identifying good curriculum management, sharing good practice, and tackling the priorities for improvement identified at the first monitoring visit to ensure a consistently high standard of teaching across all provision

The senior management team has responded well to the priorities for improvement set at the last monitoring visit. The organisational review has resulted in the number of curriculum managers being reduced from 20 to 11. This smaller number of larger curriculum areas has enabled the senior management team to ensure that all

curriculum areas now benefit from the skills and experience of the best managers. These new roles are working well to improve quality and consistency; managers are highly motivated and enthused at the opportunity to share their practice and improve their new areas of responsibility. Curriculum managers are now combining robust performance management with good developmental support for teachers, and this is already leading to improvement. The curriculum management team is focusing strongly on consistency and standardisation. Managers are using six-weekly progress boards, not only as a forum for a thorough review of learners' progress but also to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. Senior managers have introduced a new process for observations of teaching and learning which greatly increases the number of observations and the amount of peer support and individually targeted developmental work. Robust recruitment practices and probation arrangements for new teachers have been introduced by the senior management team and, recognising that the college is likely to always require a small number of agency staff, senior managers are also working with an agency to set minimum standards so that where agency teachers are required, the curriculum managers can have confidence in their ability.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Improving English and mathematics provision for all learners

The new English and mathematics team is now in place. The heads of both subjects are reporting directly to the head of teacher education and development to ensure that the development of these skills is at the heart of all teaching. This year the timetabling of separate English and mathematics lessons has been centralised and forms a core around which all other timetables have been built. This will ensure that all learners have timetables which provide sufficient scope for the development of their skills. Senior managers have made several important changes to emphasise the importance of English and mathematics to both staff and learners. For example, staff must now enforce strict entry requirements to ensure that learners are recruited onto appropriate courses where they can make good progress and develop the necessary level of English and mathematics skills to allow them to progress.

The last monitoring visit set a priority for managers to ensure that English and mathematics classes did not contain mixed levels of ability to the point where it was impossible for teachers to manage them effectively. Managers have now addressed this and care is taken to ensure that groups contain learners with similar needs and levels of skill. The new English and mathematics teams are bringing new ideas and good practice to the college and interim data suggest that results are improving. However, there is still much work to do in order to translate this new energy and impetus into sustained and significant improvement for all learners across all vocational areas.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Tackling the priorities for improvement around improving learners' attendance and punctuality identified at the first monitoring visit

Senior managers and staff have responded well to the priorities for improvement set at the last monitoring visit. The new pre-enrolment form is being used effectively by staff to identify those learners at risk of poor attendance so that support can be put into place immediately they start their courses. The new attendance and punctuality policies are significantly improved in content and clarity and include new standards for the completion of registers. However, senior managers have not given enough thought about the quality assurance arrangements for registers and how they will evaluate the accuracy of the recording of lateness or absence. Curriculum teams are now sharing information about learners effectively between teachers, progress coaches and attendance officers at six-weekly review boards and fortnightly progress meetings. Teachers are now ensuring that local flexible arrangements for attendance, for example allowing learners to attend alternative sessions, are captured on registers, so that managers have a more accurate picture of attendance across the college. Staff at all levels are focusing on solutions for poor punctuality and attendance rather than just monitoring it. However, as yet, teachers are not making enough use of judgements about learners' participation during teaching sessions, or using evaluations of this to aid tutors in discussions around attendance, punctuality and welfare concerns.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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