

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: Waltham Forest
Date of visit: 31 October 2006

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

A key strength of the last inspection was improving success rates and high success rates for adults at level 3. What do provisional data for 2005/06 show about trends in success rates?

- The college is celebrating yet another year of improvement in its headline success rate. Provisional college data already indicate a success rate of 73% (up from 70% last year), which is in line with the target set by the LLSC. However, student achievements are continuing to be recorded for 2005/06 and the college projects a more realistic success rate to be in the region of 75%. Of particular note is the dramatic improvement in the success rate on level 1 and level 2 provision for adult students. The success rate on level 1 improved by 10 percentage points to 65%; the success rate from level 2 improved from 57% to 68%. Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for learners in ESOL have been a contributing factor to this improvement. The college has worked intensively with external providers to raise learners' achievement on collaborative provision – this also accounts for improved headline success rates for adults. Collaborative provision now represents around 16% of total college provision and will be reduced to 14% by 2007. The high success rate for level 3 provision has been maintained.
- For 16 to 18 year olds headline success rates are also moving in the right direction. However, the success rate on level 2 provision is stubbornly close to the 2004/05 success rate. The college is not afraid to make hard decisions about its curriculum offer to ensure students can achieve as well as they can. For example provision in science has been closed and level 1 and level 2 provision in information and communication technology (ICT) and business has been reviewed and a more appropriate qualification is being offered.

- The college is to be commended for the significant improvement in retention on level 3 courses for 16 to 18 year olds. This was previously an area of concern. Stronger and more systematic pastoral and tutoring arrangements as well as the more manageable and flexible format of the provision have borne fruit. In 2006 the retention rate improved by 12 percentage points – however, there was a commensurate drop in overall achievement at level 3 for this age range.

Areas for improvement identified in the inspection report were the low success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 at level 3 and from black Caribbean heritage. What do 2005/06 data show in relation to these groups and what strategies have been identified to improve success rates for these learners?

- The college has taken steps to ensure greater accuracy of the data it holds on students' ethnic backgrounds – the number of students in the 'unknown' category has reduced from over 4,000 to around 370. College data have recently been distributed to curriculum for closer analysis at course level. The headline trend for 16 to 18 year olds shows underperformance of learners of Black Caribbean heritage. The college recognises a need to focus on the retention and achievement of Black Caribbean learners and on raising the achievement of learners of Pakistani heritage in this age range. In terms of adult students there are no clearly identifiable groups that perform significantly less well than other groups of students. The college has been successful in attracting funding to work collaboratively with two other colleges on investigating the factors behind differential achievement.

Was there any improvement in success rates for NVQs in hairdressing in 2006?

- Success rates in NVQ hairdressing show some improvement but remain a cause for concern for the college. The need for a stronger focus on supporting students through their main qualification aim has been recognised, as has the need to ensure more consistent tracking and assessment. Lesson observations in this area, undertaken by external consultants, indicate there is insufficient good teaching. A number of intensive strategies have been put in place to bring about improvements in this area.

Key skills success rates were identified as a weakness. What steps are being taken to ensure more learners achieve key skills qualifications?

- The college's post inspection action plan has already resulted in structural and operational changes that are showing early signs of improvement. Strategies to raise achievements in key skills include the introduction of on-line testing, putting students through practice tests, identifying a dedicated base room for tests, action planning across curriculum areas, targeted staff support and training. A new assistant principal has the remit to focus on improvements in this area and is in the process of producing a development plan to ensure all aspects of key skills delivery cohere.

Quality of education and training

The last inspection judged that there were insufficient opportunities for full-time learners to participate in work-related activities. How is the college addressing this weakness and how well is the college engaging with employers?

- The college has made progress in addressing this weakness, through the activities of the Business and International Development Unit, and through activities within schools. The unit is currently seeking funding to support an employer liaison and placement post for a two-year period. The unit has also gained support from the London Development Agency to provide for paid student internships, initially in catering and hospitality. It is expected that around 125 students will benefit from this scheme across the next four years. The unit has increased its contact with employers through an initiative to offer training for businesses with 20 or more employees. To date around 40 employers have been provided with a training needs analysis and training packages. Work is currently underway with a number of partners to expand construction training within the region in response to skills shortages.
- An industrial placement officer is now part of the health and social care team, and students currently spend two days per week on placements. Catering and hospitality students on two-year programmes usually undertake paid work experience between their two years of study. Current first-year students will undertake two weeks industrial experience in April 2007. In addition, catering students undertake

simulated work experience in the college cafeteria and stores. Discussions are underway with a local Primary Care Trust to develop work experience and sponsorship opportunities for students. Within travel and tourism, the college has allocated work placement responsibility to a member of staff, and plans are in place to re-instate a two-week work experience for students in April 2007. Sport and leisure students should now receive two periods of work experience, in an agreement with a commercial provider of leisure courses. In the school of engineering there are plans to re-launch an industrial liaison group, improving links with employers and securing placements for students; in automotive engineering negotiations are underway with a major car manufacturer to secure work placements in exchange for staff training. However, these projects are at an early stage and activity has yet to commence.

Provision in hospitality was judged to be unsatisfactory. What steps have been taken to improve the quality of provision in this area (in particular the quality of theory teaching) and how effectively is progress being monitored in this area.

- There have been significant changes in staffing within the curriculum area, including the appointment of new head of school, catering operations manager and curriculum manager. A range of under-performing courses has been withdrawn from the curriculum offer. Staff are more fully involved in the interviewing and initial assessment of students. Students now complete evaluations in each session, which are discussed and signed off by the class lecturer. Every theory class now opens with a ten-minute review to check student learning from the previous session. Teaching and learning materials have been revised and a resource bank has been developed by the curriculum manager.
- There has been one round of formal graded observations of teaching and learning, and another is about to commence. Staff have also been timetabled to engage in peer observations. Advanced practitioners support those staff who received a low grade in their teaching observation. Team meetings are more regular and focus on key matters such as standardisation, development of resources and sharing of good practice. Members of the team have visited other colleges to observe and record good practice. Improvements are overseen by a project management team, led by a vice principal. The team meets weekly to assess progress against an action plan, which has been shared with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Provision in ICT and health, social care and early years were judged to be good. How effectively does the college identify good practice in teaching and learning in these areas and disseminate it throughout the college? For example, what is the college doing to ensure that more able learners are given sufficient challenge in all their lessons?

- The college has derived enormous benefit from observations carried out by external consultants. The findings and outcomes have been used well to focus on where improvement strategies need to be focussed. The new management structure is also having a significant impact on the college's capacity to pinpoint weaknesses and diagnose appropriate remedies to improve the quality of teaching and learning. An assistant principal now has oversight relating to developments in improving teaching and learning and meets regularly with key staff involved in driving improvements forward across the college. There is a sense of renewed energy, vigour and enthusiasm. Staff involved in improving teaching and learning are much clearer about their roles and are now better placed to draw on each other's expertise more effectively. There are many opportunities for staff to share good practice in teaching and learning, not least through an exciting menu of 'practitioner workshops' that include inviting titles such as 'The X Factor' or 'Weighing the pigs'.

Monitoring of attendance and punctuality across the college has been variable. How does the college know whether or not this is now more consistent?

- The college is acutely aware that attendance and punctuality needs to improve. Appropriate strategies are in place and are understood across the college, senior staff also have a higher profile around corridors at key points during the day.

Leadership and management

Since the last AAV the senior management team has been strengthened with some new appointments. What has been the impact of these posts?

- The senior management team has been enhanced by the appointment of three new assistant principals who joined the college in August 2006. There are already signs of the positive impact of these posts on

the college. Middle managers and other staff have been mobilised into coherent and focussed working groups which allows the college to draw more effectively on the wealth of skill and capacity that already exists within the college. Staff are generally clearer about their roles within the college and can talk more confidently and expertly about their contribution to actions that will improve the quality of students' learning.

Is there an accommodation strategy to address areas of the college that restrict the effectiveness of teaching and learning?

- Engineering theory rooms remain drab and dreary, but contain adequate resources for teaching and learning. An accommodation strategy is in place and the college is working closely with the local LSC to develop plans for demolition of parts of the main building plus another structure on the main site. It is expected that negotiations will be completed by the end of 2007 and early work commenced during 2008.

Taking into account the outcomes of the Ofsted survey of June 2006 'Safeguarding Children' (HMI 2647) a follow up letter was sent to colleges on 17 July 2006 setting out the arrangements for improved record-keeping of checks on staff. What action has the college taken in relation to these proposals, is there a single central record in place?

- The college has a single central record which shows the recruitment and vetting checks undertaken relating to staff identity, qualifications and criminal records. This is monitored regularly by the personnel department which is very thorough in ensuring that enhanced CRB checks are undertaken for all staff. The college systematically carries out List 99 checks in case there are any delays in the processing of CRB forms.