



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



RE-INSPECTION OF SANDWELL COLLEGE

Published April 2005

Outcome of Re-Inspection

- The overall provision in the curriculum area of childcare is now **satisfactory**.
- The overall provision in the curriculum area of humanities is now **satisfactory**.
- The overall provision in the work-based learning (WBL) area of hairdressing and beauty therapy is now **satisfactory**.
- The overall provision in the curriculum area of ICT remains **unsatisfactory**.
- The overall provision for the WBL area of construction remains **unsatisfactory**.

Background

Sandwell College was inspected in March 2003. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in the curriculum areas of ICT, child care, and humanities, and the WBL areas of construction and hairdressing and beauty therapy, which were found to be less than satisfactory.

Ofsted and the ALI have particular duties in relation to colleges where their inspection report indicates that individual curriculum and/or work-based learning (WBL) areas are unsatisfactory or very weak or where leadership and management are unsatisfactory or very weak. Where a college has been judged to have less than satisfactory leadership and management, or less than satisfactory provision in solely WBL, inspectors from Ofsted or the ALI will visit the college to carry

out monitoring inspections of the less than satisfactory areas. As a result of the re-inspection monitoring visits, inspectors may judge that previously less than satisfactory areas of provision, or leadership and management, are now satisfactory and that no further visits are required. Where leadership and management are satisfactory, but there is curriculum provision that is less than satisfactory, there will be no monitoring visits. All less than satisfactory provision will be re-inspected, normally during one week, within two years of the original inspection.

If, after approximately 24 months, the college has not made sufficient progress to justify a judgement that the curriculum or WBL area or leadership and management are satisfactory, the original grade for the area that continues to be unsatisfactory will remain on the college's record until the next full inspection within the cycle. Ofsted will inform the local LSC that provision remains unsatisfactory and the reasons why.

Date of the Re-Inspection

In accordance with the above procedures, re-inspection of the curriculum areas of ICT, childcare, and humanities, and the WBL areas of construction and hairdressing and beauty therapy, took place during the week of 7 March 2005.

Childcare

In the **March 2003** inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be **unsatisfactory**. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- the good level of practical skills
- well-planned progression pathways in 2002/3.

Weaknesses

- very low retention rates at NVQ level 2
- low pass rates on courses at levels 2 and 3
- the lack of student interaction in small classes
- insufficient use of feedback on teaching and learning by student and placement supervisors.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now satisfactory.

Retention on NVQ level two is improving. In 2003/04, retention was still low at 58%, but in-year college data shows it to be 82% at the time of the re-inspection. Retention is low on NVQ level three. Pass rates on full time level two courses have improved significantly. In 2003 and 2004 the pass rate for the certificate in childcare and education was 100%. Pass rates for NVQs at level two have improved in 2004 and are now at the national average. On full time level three courses, pass rates are now good. Pass rates on NVQ level three continue to improve slowly but remain low.

Teaching is good on part time courses for adults. Teachers are giving more consideration to teaching methods with small groups of students. Full time courses at levels one and two now have group sizes of more than 10. At level three the group sizes continue to be small but the combining of year 1 and 2 diploma students provides sufficient opportunities for teaching to promote effective interaction between students.

Two placement supervisors have been appointed to monitor student progress in the workplace. Their judgments about student progress are included in the first teaching session of the week and there are good and improving links between learning in college and that in the workplace. Written and verbal feedback to students on their written work is satisfactory. Most teachers provide constructive and supportive comments. However, teachers do not use effective methods in the classroom to test learning, knowledge and understanding with full time level three students

Humanities

In the March 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- high pass rates in GCE A2 sociology and GCE A2 law in 2002
- good teaching on GCE A-level courses
- good pastoral support for adults.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates in GCE AS sociology
- poor records for attendance and punctuality

- unsuitable teaching accommodation at one site
- insufficient use of students' prior achievements in setting targets
- insufficient use of management information for improvement of performance.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now **satisfactory**.

Pass rates on AS level sociology have improved significantly and in 2004 stood at 100%. However retention rates on AS level psychology and sociology remain low. Pass rates in AS level law have dropped significantly and have been poor since 2003. Other pass rates are generally satisfactory.

Record keeping and the use of data for course management have improved significantly. Students' punctuality has also improved and work continues to be undertaken with the implementation of a new lateness policy. Staff address lateness systematically. Despite continued efforts to improve students' attendance, it remains poor in GCE A-level subjects and access to higher education.

Teaching accommodation is now good. Humanities students use dedicated rooms which are well furnished. Most rooms have high quality IT equipment. This equipment is used regularly and there is effective use of ILT to support learning in lessons. Teaching is generally good.

The college now offers good enrichment opportunities to students. These include visits directly related to a subject, such as to the Magistrates Court for Law. They also include an extensive wider programme of trips that have taken students to destinations such as Prague, Barcelona, Paris and London. Key skills have recently been integrated into GCSE and A-level subjects, although the impact of this on the achievement of key skills qualifications is not yet known.

Student target setting remains limited. Students have at least one individual tutorial each term, taking the form of personal reviews. Pastoral support is good. However assessment is not used effectively to monitor and steer students' progress. For AS and GCE A-level students, their GCSE entry scores are calculated but these are not yet used as a basis for setting target grades.

Management information is now more accessible and used regularly in curriculum review and planning. Curriculum managers have access to a range of standard reports on student data which they use to monitor the performance of their area. Curriculum leadership and management are improving. The new management structure has improved communication between staff, and roles and responsibilities of staff are well understood.

WBL hairdressing and beauty therapy

In the March 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be very weak. The following strengths and weaknesses for hairdressing and beauty therapy as a whole were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- high pass rates on the body massage certificate
- the good practical skills of students
- very good teaching in beauty and holistic therapy
- the flexible organization of courses for the benefit of students
- good initial advice
- good tutorial support.

Weaknesses

- below average retention rates on hairdressing at NVQ level 2
- unsatisfactory achievement on work-based learning programmes
- slow progress in the achievement of key skills
- lack of thorough internal verification
- a slow response to students' basic skills needs
- the inadequate management of work-based learning.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that progress has been made in addressing the above

weaknesses. The overall provision in this area is now satisfactory.

Retention of apprentices is now good. In 2002/03 retention was 76%. However, in 2003/04 it dropped to 54% for first year students, but those in their second year are all still in learning. In-year retention for starters in 2004/05 is good at 82%. There are strong indications that these learners will complete their framework. The anticipated achievement for starters in 2003/04 is 64% against 17% for the previous year.

Good progress is being made on key skills. Learners' previous levels of attainment are diagnosed during induction by the use of online assessment and the recognition of proxy status. Lessons observed during the re-inspection show some good teaching. Classes are well managed and engage the students. Apprentices demonstrated good practical skills. However, attendance at lessons was low.

Internal verification is now satisfactory. It meets awarding body standards and records are maintained well. There are now more assessors visiting the workplace and learners can be assessed on demand. Students are visited every 6 to 8 weeks for a review. However, some review targets lack specific vocational detail. There is insufficient analysis of why targets are missed and of the impact of agreed actions. There are too many general comments in the review reports.

The quality of initial advice is improving. There is effective guidance to ensure work-based learning is the most suitable route for the applicant. Initial testing to identify learners' support needs is now efficient and learners are provided with support promptly.

There has been a significant improvement in the management of work-based learning. Much work has been done in restructuring the work-based learning unit. Individual learning plans are well maintained. Employers and learners are aware of learners' progress. A new electronic tracking system has been established. The unit has taken steps to establish how much on-the-job training takes place and new placements are closely vetted. However, employer links are under-developed. Some new systems are slow to be embedded. For example, detailed occupational guidance to support employers' understanding has not been produced. The first newsletter to employers is still not finalised. Employers' views are not thoroughly captured nor feedback given to them on their responses.

WBL construction

In the March 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses for construction as a whole were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- high pass rates and retention rates on gas courses

- the good practical skills of students

- good teaching in practical classes

- good resources in electrical, plastering and gas vocational areas

- effective systems for recording, monitoring and tracking students' progress.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on GNVQ courses
- declining retention rates on foundation courses
- insufficient facilities in brickwork and plumbing
- poor attendance and late arrival of students in some lessons.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that insufficient progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area remains **unsatisfactory**.

Although the college has taken some steps to address the weaknesses identified previously, achievement within the planned timescale on the foundation modern apprenticeship framework remains very poor. It has declined from 5% in 2002/03 to 0% in 2003/04. The achievement of NVQs is also very low. Retention rates are also decreasing. Most learners do not complete within their allocated time period and require extensions to complete their framework.

On-site reviews and monitoring visits now take place four times per year. Specific targets are set for learners related to their qualifications. Equality and diversity issues and health and safety feature strongly in these reviews. However, employers are not involved in the review process, nor are previous targets revisited to measure the progress made by learners.

The appointment of a trade-specific learner assessment officer in electrical installation and a work-based key skills coordinator has improved on-site assessments and key skills delivery. On-site assessments are rigorous and are now planned with employers. The achievement of key skills shows signs of improvement. However, these actions have only come about recently and have not yet had a sufficient impact on learners' achievements.

The learner assessment officer has started to check with employers that the work carried out in the workplace covers the requirements of the NVQ. The co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training is now effective.

Teaching in lessons observed was either good or satisfactory. Good use is made of ILT to support teaching and learning. Teachers use powerpoint presentations and the interactive whiteboard to reinforce key points and to ensure that learners maintain interest in lessons. References given to learners often include relevant websites. Learners' written work also shows that ILT is used effectively. There is satisfactory checking on learners' progress and understanding. Practical activities are well organised, are carried out safely, and relate closely to situations found in the workplace. The delivery of key skills is satisfactory. Learners' attendance in lessons and punctuality

are also now satisfactory.

The development of learners' practical skills in the workplace and at the college is good. Learners develop a range of hand skills and produce good quality practical work that meets industry standards. However, the electrical installation workshop needs substantial refurbishment. The surfaces of its training bays, on which learners mark the position of components and cable runs and then install their circuits, are in a poor state and need replacement. Some of the benches in the workshop and the quality of basic hand tools are unsatisfactory.

Course evaluation and review reports have not been compiled. Teams have not systematically analysed and adequately reviewed performance at course level or produced action points for each course.

ICT

In the March 2003 inspection, the quality of overall provision in this area was judged to be unsatisfactory. The following strengths and weaknesses were identified in the inspection report:

Strengths

- the high rate of retention of full-time students
- the good standard of work in students' files
- effective support for students
- good ICT resources in outreach centres.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on most courses
- low attendance and a poor record on punctuality in many courses
- inadequate advice and guidance on enrolments to part-time courses

- underdeveloped links with industry
- some unsatisfactory teaching
- lack of accountability in the management of ICT
- poor internal communications across ICT.

Following the re-inspection, inspectors judged that insufficient progress has been made in addressing the above weaknesses. The overall provision in this area remains **unsatisfactory**.

There have been low and declining pass rates and falling retention on most courses in 2003/04. For example, GNVQ intermediate pass rates fell by 15% to 56%, well below the national average. However, there have been major curriculum changes for 2004/05 with the introduction of the BTEC suite of full time courses and a reduction in the number of part time courses offered. These changes are showing encouraging signs, with college data on in-year retention at 85% and increased flexibility of programmes for students. However, attendance is still unsatisfactory. It was 67% in lessons observed during the re-inspection, well below the national average. Students' work continues to be effectively supported and is still of a good standard.

A significant proportion of less than satisfactory teaching was observed during the re-inspection. In better sessions, teachers are making good use of ILT in lessons and providing a variety of teaching methods and activities to engage students and maintain their interest. In weaker lessons, questioning techniques lacked rigour and failed to ascertain students' understanding. Some quieter students did not participate.

There have been recent improvements to equipment to address the speed and reliability of computers, although some rooms lack adequate ventilation. Resources are generally good, with data projectors, specialist software, electronic whiteboards and specialist computer rooms for networking. The learning resource centre is spacious and well-equipped, with a number of computers set aside for the use of ICT students. There has been little improvement in developing industrial links within the curriculum area, with few links to the world of work.

Leadership and management are weak and have failed to raise standards and performance. Although there have been recent changes to the management of the area, it is too early to judge the impact of these. Appointments have only recently been made to key programme manager and team leader posts. There is little evidence of rigorous course team meetings and course reviews. Internal communication is beginning to improve with the new structure, but mechanisms are not yet fully embedded.

There will be no further re-inspection of the college because the stipulated 24 months from the original inspection has expired.

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