

RE-INSPECTION OF SOUTHPORT COLLEGE

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Outcome of Re-Inspection

The overall provision in the curriculum area of Foundation Programmes is now satisfactory.

Background

Southport College was inspected in February 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 Foundation Programmes which was 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 Foundation Programmes took place on 7 - 11 February 2005.

Foundation Programmes

In the February 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

- good support for students
- effective curriculum planning to meet students' needs in literacy and numeracy.

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching resources
- inadequate initial assessment and monitoring of progress for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- poor pass rates on some numeracy courses
- insufficiently demanding teaching.

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 is high and is above the national average on most courses. However, in 2004, achievement of qualifications on many courses was unsatisfactory. The best results were on the entry level Essential Skills programme with a pass rate of 97%. On the OCR level 1 'Preparation for Employment' course only 8 of 28 students completing the course gained the full award. Since the last inspection, pass rates have declined on both the level 1 and level 2 City & Guilds literacy courses. Pass rates on the numeracy level 2 provision remain below the national average.

Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the last inspection. The grades for good or better teaching and learning in observed lessons rose to slightly above the national average. In the best lessons, there are different teaching approaches and opportunities for students to make choices and decisions. Account is taken of specific learning needs and teachers encourage active learning. In a minority of lessons, students are not being sufficiently challenged, motivation is low and students have little idea why they are undertaking tasks. Students attend well and are punctual. Average attendance in the lessons observed was 95%.

There are insufficient opportunities within the curriculum for Essential Skills students to learn within real-life environments and situations. There are too few practical contexts for experiential and vocational learning in an atmosphere that promotes independence and advocacy. The existing emphasis is on task completion within a classroom environment. Although progression routes for adult students are gradually being developed, for those with the most complex needs there is a limited range of vocational options. The work placement programme for students with severe

learning difficulties is underdeveloped.

Since the last inspection the implementation of careful initial assessment ensures that learners' objectives are closely matched to their needs. Teachers set firm boundaries for achievement by asking students to complete set tasks to a high standard at a suitable working pace. In literacy and numeracy, assessment and recording meet the high standards required by awarding bodies. Students undertake self-evaluation as part of this programme and effectively develop personal and independent learning skills. There has been success in attracting mature and part-time students through outreach centres and community-based provision.

The recording of achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is underdeveloped. In the most effective lessons, the evaluation column on individual record sheets is used to record student progress and inform planning. However, there is inconsistent recording of achievement against individual objectives. Many staff lack sufficient specialist expertise to record achievement appropriately, and comments at the end of lessons are descriptive rather than evaluative. As a result, opportunities to update information and build on recently acquired skills are lost. No easily measurable criteria against which progress can be judged are set out in individual learning plans. Little formative assessment takes place and there is little student ownership of achievement.

There is good individual support for students, some of whom have difficult personal and social problems and present challenging behaviour. Good staff ratios within discrete sessions together with access to relevant expertise in the basic skills department has helped all students to develop appropriate social and personal skills and effective communication skills. Students enjoy good access to ICT during and outside lessons and this supports the development of independent learning skills. Effective use of specialist equipment together with continuity of staffing for groups within discrete provision, have promoted the development of functional skills that contribute to the quality of students' lives. Learning environments are well resourced and provide good opportunities for learning. ICT is used extensively to meet the learning needs of the students.

Leadership and management of courses are satisfactory. There is a commitment to improving performance and developing learning opportunities for both young people and adults. Restructuring of provision since the inspection and recruitment of key staff has had a beneficial impact. Self-assessment is well developed and the self-assessment report accurately identified some of the main weaknesses within the area. Some good practice has been developed but it is not always shared across teams. Appraisals of all staff are carried out annually but they do not include a focus on specialist training for teachers of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Too few of these teachers have specialist qualifications.

There will be no further re-inspection of the college because there are no remaining unsatisfactory areas.