

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: North West Kent College
Date of visit: 22 May 2007

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

Will there be an improvement in AS success rates and progress made by students on these courses in 2007? How effective are the measures put in place by the college?

- AS-level courses which were identified at the last inspection as having low success rates have been monitored effectively. The department's action plan has brought about improvement in the overall retention rate which is now 7 percentage points higher than last year. It is too early to assess whether these measures will have a positive impact on achievement.

Quality of education and training

What progress has been made in improving good or better teaching since the last inspection? Has the moderation of lesson observations improved?

- College data suggests that the proportion of good or better teaching is now 76% which is an improvement of two percentage points on the previous year. The college has concentrated on improving the skills of observers to ensure that the recording of lesson observations is accurate, in addition to revising observation documentation. The results of lesson observations now undergo a more detailed two-stage moderation process where identified issues are reported back to observers. This process is effective in establishing a consistent approach. Managers are aware that observations undertaken at the start of the academic year were not as accurately recorded as those undertaken after staff development was implemented.

- There are also plans to support teachers to improve classroom delivery and to raise staff awareness in respect of the grading of lesson observations. This support will run alongside scheduled staff development activities already identified by the college.

How has the monitoring of student progress improved since the last inspection?

- The college is in the final stages of preparing a specification for a new individual learning plan for students. The specification draws together existing learning plans, action plans and management information and provides a clear structure for monitoring students' progress. Implementation of the plans is scheduled for September 2007. The new individual learning plans will also identify students' literacy and numeracy needs, how they are being met and the progress they are making. Personal tutors have been involved in the development of the ILP specification to ensure the plans will support learning. Quality assurance procedures for ensuring that plans are completed to an appropriate standard have yet to be developed as have the mechanisms for ensuring senior managers' overview of their impact.

Leadership and management

At the last inspection the skills for life provision was judged to be inadequate. How are managers bringing about improvement?

- Senior managers are clear about the actions that need to be taken to improve skills for life provision. The post-inspection action plan identifies the steps that need to be taken and the college's skills for life strategy provides an appropriate framework for guiding developments. Overall, the management of skills for life is improving and skills for life are now featuring more centrally in the work of school heads. The college's expectations of heads of schools in implementing the skills for life strategy are not clear.
- Students' literacy and numeracy needs are identified early and the form of support they require specified. The circumstances under which the college regards Adult Basic Skills Qualifications to be appropriate for 16 to 18 year olds are not clear. Take up of basic skills support has increased since the last inspection but there is room for further improvement.

- Students who accept the support offered perform significantly better on their main programme of study than those who decline. Different approaches to providing basic skills support were being piloted at the time of the visit to identify the approaches which suit different vocational contexts best. The extent to which heads of schools are committed to developing skills for life and to developing key skills through students' main programmes of learning varies across curriculum areas but is improving.
- Decisive steps have been taken to improve the quality and accessibility of management information and skills for life are clearly identified in the newly developed specification for students' individual action plans. Although these developments provide a firm foundation for monitoring students' progress, the tracking of students' progress in achieving key skill qualifications and improving their skills for life is at an early stage of development. Support is provided to help teachers teach and assess key skills. Moderation of lesson observations has improved as has feedback and development opportunities. These are helping teachers improve their practice.

At the last inspection it was identified that the college needed to address how data are used to analyse and improve course performance. The post-inspection action plan identified actions that had been put in place. What progress has been made?

- The college provides detailed management information to enable departmental managers to analyse and review course performance. Data regarding enrolment, retention and achievement is accessible and regularly used by heads of department to identify performance on a course-by-course level. Actions to improve poorly performing courses are identified by heads of departments and monitored by senior managers. Formal reviews of departmental performance are undertaken regularly in various review meetings by senior managers. The college has created a new quality monitoring group which is chaired by a member of the senior management team. This group regularly reviews the performance of departments in relation to key performance indicators. Departmental performance analysis does not at present include performance of learners on key skills programmes.

- The college recognised that the collection of learner data on key skills was not effective at the last inspection. There are now effective systems in place to collect initial information on entry qualifications and learning goals of all learners. Managers are aware that more work needs to be done for the college to hold up-to-date, centralised data particularly when learners' qualification aims change. This process is currently under development.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has approved in principle the College's bid for funding to improve accommodation. Has the college made any progress in improving accommodation in engineering, construction, ICT, media, creative arts and skills for life?

- The college has made short term accommodation improvements in the areas of construction, engineering and ICT. In response to its capital bid the college successfully secured LSC funds to improve its Gravesend site. Work will commence in September 2007. Funding approved for this project is £45 million. A further development bid of £65 million for the Dartford site is to be sought in September. All work is scheduled to be completed by September 2011.