

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Waltham Forest College
Date of visit: 12 December 2007

Context

Waltham Forest College is a large general further education college within the area of the London North. The mission guiding the direction of the College is 'Working with our communities to realise potential through lifelong learning'. The London Borough of Waltham Forest is extremely diverse with areas of relative prosperity to the North and other wards amongst the 10% most deprived in the country. Many students attending the College travel from Redbridge, Haringey, Hackney and a range of other areas.

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in May 2006 and an Annual Assessment Visit (AAV) in Oct 2006. At the previous inspection, Waltham Forest College overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory. Capacity to improve was judged to be good and achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management graded as satisfactory. Of the six subject sectors inspected, two subject sectors were graded as good, three as satisfactory and hospitality graded as inadequate. At the time of the monitoring visit, interim arrangements are in place to cover for the Principal who left in August 2007. The latest self assessment report for 2006/07 had been reviewed by the Governing body as a draft and was due to be approved on 18 December 2007.

Achievement and standards

How has the College continued to improve success rates since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The College has made reasonable progress in improving success rates since the previous inspection. Since 2005/06, success rates for all courses, ages and levels for 2006/07 have improved by 3% points to 79%. Over the same period, the overall long course success rates for all courses, ages and levels have improved by 5% points to 72%. The most significant improvement is at level 1, with an increase of 12% points to 79%. Overall level 2 long course success rates have improved marginally. For 16-18 year old learners the increase has been 5% points to 65% and for 19+ learners the increase has been 1% point to 74%. However, overall level 3 long course

success rates have declined by 1% point. For 16-18 year old and 19+ learners the success rates are 62% and 66% respectively. Both level 3 2006/07 success rates are below the 2005/06 national average by 4% points.

Short course success rates for 2006/07 improved by 1% point overall to 83%. Short course success rates for courses of more than 5 weeks for 19+ learners improved by 4% points to 83%. However, all aspects of short course provision continue to be significantly below national averages. Although, at the time of the visit there were a number of unknown outcomes impacting on short course success rates for 2006/07. The College has recognised that some learners where English is not the first language had been enrolled on short courses and that systems to support such learners are not yet fully in place on particular short courses.

Short course success rates are adversely effected by enrolling many learners where English is not the first language. However, appropriate systems to support such learners' are not yet fully in place.

Success rate targets set for individual courses are set against general cross college targets set for particular aspects of provision. For example, level 1, 16-18 year old full time courses. However, this approach does not reflect the current position of each course and in many cases a target is set lower than the individual course has continuously achieved. The College failed to achieve many of the challenging key success rate targets set for 2006/07. Although, senior management are fully aware of the current situation and are in the process of setting challenging but more appropriate success rate targets for 2007/08.

Since the previous inspection and the AAV, what improvements have been achieved in the provision of key skills?	Insufficient progress
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The College has made insufficient progress towards the improvement of key skills. College data shows that success rates between 2005/06 and 2006/07 have improved by 7% points to 29%. The College is still collecting key skills achievement data and is confident that the final success rate should be higher. The College recognises the lack of progress towards improving key skill success rates, however, since the previous inspection, a number of improvements have been made. A senior manager has been appointed to oversee improvements and there is a clear action plan in place. Curriculum Managers are now accountable for key skills within their area. They are required to organise training in key skills to support staff development.

Quality assurance arrangements have been improved. Course reviews specifically focus on improvements of key skills. However, there is still too much variation across the College in terms of success rates and practice. The College recognises that in general, students do not value key skills.

Based upon the strategies identified in the previous annual assessment visit, what progress has been made in improving attendance and punctuality?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving attendance and punctuality. Learners' attendance and punctuality are now regularly monitored. Learners' have good access to their attendance records. They are generally aware of their performance and regularly check using the college's on line system. The system is also used well by tutors and lecturers. Swift action is taken on absence.

Attendance and punctuality is linked well to individual learning plans. Learners are rewarded for exemplary attendance. Managers understand and use information well to evaluate attendance and punctuality. College attendance figures show marginal improvement from 80% in 2005/06 to 81% in 2006/07. Currently the overall attendance rate is 84%. Overall, attendance rates of females and males are approximately the same however there are some sector subject areas where the differences in attendance rates of each are significant. Currently the attendance rate of female learners aged under 16 is significantly less than all other age groups for males or females. Overall, attendance for learners aged 16-19 and adults from different cultural groups are mostly around or above the current college average attendance rate. The self assessment report includes reasonable targets for improving attendance. Learners' punctuality is still an issue for some sector subject areas.

Quality of provision

Following on from the previous inspection and AAV, what progress has been made to the quality of hospitality provision?	Reasonable progress
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The College has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of hospitality and catering provision. Success rates for 2006/07 have significantly improved. All long courses are now well above 2005/06 national averages. The staffing profile has changed and communication and sharing of best practice has improved. The teaching and learning profile has also much improved. The internal teaching and learning observations of March 2007 highlight a general improvement with more good and less inadequate teaching. A key weakness at the previous inspection was the quality of the teaching of theory lessons. The College has taken positive actions to support the delivery of theory lessons. For example, IT facilities have improved. Students evaluate all lessons and the feedback is effectively used. The College plans to convert a small kitchen into a flexible theory and practical training area. The primary focus being to deliver theory lessons in a more interactive and practically applied way.

Learners are very positive about the quality of training and the personal support they receive. They state that staff are very supportive of their individual needs and help them to achieve their goals within and outside of college.

A new manager has recently been appointed and is well supported by senior management. The College has recently self assessed the hospitality and catering department as an improving satisfactory provision.

Since the previous inspection has the college made progress with the tutorial process?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has successfully reviewed and implemented a new tutorial system for certain targeted college departments. Newly appointed personal tutors have specific responsibility for tutorials and have no teaching commitment. However, some sector subject areas are still awaiting a full designated specialist tutorial member of staff. All tutorial staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Communication between lecturers, managers and personal tutors' is effective. All parties work well together to support and reinforce the monitoring and review of learners' progress. The college regularly reviews practice through tutorial management meetings and tutorial practitioner meetings. Staff generally appreciate the change in the system and learners are aware and value tutorials. Although some learners' are unaware that one to one tutorials take place. Some sector subject areas operate a different system which is deemed historically successful.