

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Mid Kent College

Date of visit: 11 March 2008

Context

Mid Kent College has three main centres: Oakwood Park in Maidstone, Horsted at Chatham and City Way in Rochester. A fourth center at Chatham Maritime is accommodated on the Universities at Medway campus.

The college provides programmes in all 15 subject sector areas. Those with the highest number of guided learning hours are health, public services & care; retail and commercial enterprise; engineering, construction; information technology and business. Work-based learning is offered in construction, engineering, business, and hairdressing. The college has a mobile learning service which provides short training courses at employers' premises and in rural and isolated community venues throughout Kent and Medway.

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in March 2005 and a re-inspection of construction and work based learning in March 2007. At the last inspection, leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. Of the ten subject sector areas inspected, one was graded as good, eight graded as satisfactory and one graded as unsatisfactory. Work based learning was judged to be unsatisfactory. At the re-inspection, construction was graded as satisfactory and of the four work based learning areas re-inspected, two were graded as good and two graded as satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving level 1 long course success rates since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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Overall, the college has made reasonable progress in improving level 1 long course success rates. Prior to 2006/07, success rates were generally improving, but not as well as the national average. However, in 2006/07, success rates made a significant improvement and are now well above national averages. For students aged 16-18, in 2004/05, success rates for level one long courses are 3.7% below national average and in 2005/06 they

were 6% below the national average. However, in 2006/07, the success rate improved by 15 percentage points to 78%. At the time of the monitoring visit, 2006/07 national averages were not available. The national average in 2005/06 is 69%. Success rates for adult students in 2004/05 are 8% below national average and in 2005/06, 9.6% below. However, in 2006/07, the success rate improved by 16 percentage points to 72%. The national average in 2005/06 is 65%.

The overall rise in success rates between 2005/06 and 2006/07 has not been experienced by all subject sectors. For example, in preparation for life and work and business the improvement has been significant and good in information and communication technology (ICT). However, in construction and engineering, success rates have remained static and in health and public services and care the success rate has declined. The retention rate for level 1 long courses in 2006/07 is 83%. As at the 9th March 2008, the retention rate is 93%.

Staff confirm that the management information system has much improved since the previous inspection. Data are used well and in a timely manner. Staff have a good understanding of current data related to their courses and take appropriate actions when necessary. Actions for improvement are closely monitored.

What progress has been made to improve key skills success rates?	Insufficient progress
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The college has made insufficient progress in the improvement of its key skills success rates. The college acknowledges that although there have been some improvements in its key skills strategy, it is too soon to have had sufficient impact on the low success rates. In 2005/06, success rates in communication and application of number key skills and level 1 in ICT are well below the national average. Success rates in 2006/07 for application of number and communications have seen marginal improvement, although they are still too low. Success rates for level 2 and 3 in ICT declined in 2006/07.

For 2007/08, the college has set a challenging target of 60% for key skills success rates. A new delivery model of embedding key skills has recently been partly implemented. Phase two is planned for 2008/09 and will see the whole college operating the new model.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing a more rigorous lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching?	Significant progress
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Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress to integrate and develop further improvements to the observation of teaching and learning process. In 2005/06, the college revised the internal observation scheme. This resulted in a dramatic decline in the awarding of good or better teaching and learning grades to 51%. However, the college also implemented a clear strategy of further support and training for teaching staff to improve the college teaching and learning profile. In 2006/07, most teachers were observed at least once and 66% of teaching and learning was judged to be good. The percentage of unsatisfactory teaching and learning was reduced by a half, to 4%. Early indications of 2007/08 grades show further improvements.

The college scheme is now very thorough. Individual grades awarded at observation are not shared with individual teachers. They are used to inform departmental and cross college performance. The focus of the scheme is on the improvement of teaching and learning regardless of grade awarded. Departmental reports on teaching and learning are appropriate. The reports are used well to inform department and college training plans. Departmental reports are shared with all staff at team meetings and form a key part of course and department self assessment reports. Staff confirm that this approach is an effective way of improving teaching and learning at course level. Individual performance is monitored closely by line managers who follow through with additional 'drop in' observations to assess that actions for improvement have been implemented.

Of the observation records viewed during the visit, feedback of performance to staff did not clearly indicate the grade being awarded.

What action has been taken to improve the quality of tutorials for learners aged 16-18?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of tutorials for learners aged 16-18. At the last inspection, some group tutorials

were poorly planned. However, a generic scheme of work is now in place for group tutorials. Tutors are able to tailor the scheme to meet their students' needs and course requirements. Three individual academic review meetings are planned over the academic year with opportunities for students to formally self-evaluate their own progress. A key aspect of the tutorial process is the monitoring of attendance, which has seen improvements since the last inspection. Students state that they feel very well supported by tutors but not all students relate the work they undertake during timetabled tutorials with the planned scheme of work.

Personal tutors report improved access to the sharing of good practice and general communications across all three campuses through the recent introduction and use of an internal on-line facility.

Leadership and management

How rigorous is the self assessment process to bring about continuous improvement?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress to improve the self assessment process and to bring about continuous improvement.

The self assessment process has much improved since the last inspection. It is used to form the basis of continuous improvement. The process is thorough, robust and inclusive. Self assessment reports are detailed and make clear judgements on strengths and areas for improvement. The awarding of self assessment grades to subject sectors is particularly robust. Reports are insightful and link well to development plans. Development plans at all levels are closely monitored for improvements. Targets for improvement are set by course teams and line managers. All staff and governors are fully informed of progress against targets. A 'traffic light' system is used effectively to monitor progress. The principal has introduced a student voice forum to directly gauge student views and plan for improvements. Departmental quality reviews are thorough and detailed. They are used well to inform self assessment. Quality assurance and improvement are closely monitored.

Staff state that since the last inspection there has been a much clearer focus on improvement and devolved accountability. They talk of a change in the culture of the college's ethos towards improving the student experience.

Based upon the college's self assessment report, the college has recognised significant improvements to subject sectors since the last inspection, as in, for example, health and care, information technology, hospitality, business, hair and visual and performing arts.

The college has not recognised key skills as a key area for improvement in its self assessment.

What actions have been taken to improve the monitoring and evaluation of equal opportunity practices?	Significant progress
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At the last inspection, arrangements for equality of opportunity were unsatisfactory. Since then the college has made significant progress. The college has developed a particularly useful booklet containing comprehensive information relating to their equal opportunities policy and associated policies and schemes on disability, race, gender, mental health and anti bullying and harassment. The policies are available on-line. Four tutors have responsibility as equality and diversity champions. Appropriate and detailed action plans are now in place and the college is compliant with equalities legislation. A member of the governing body, with relevant experience in equality and diversity issues, takes an active role in monitoring equality of opportunity across the college as well as acting as a mentor for staff. Staff development and training arrangements are ongoing and on-line training modules in equality and diversity issues have been developed and implemented for all staff.

Management use a variety of equality and diversity data to inform planning. For example, they have made changes in how students report any disabilities to ensure the college has more accurate information. The changes in the student cohort over the past few years and the close monitoring of this has led to a revision to disciplinary policy as well as training for staff.