Knowsley Community College

Inspection report

Provider reference	130486
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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:
• *grade 1 – outstanding*
• *grade 2 – good*
• *grade 3 – satisfactory*
• *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Knowsley Community College is a general further education (GFE) college that was formed in April 1990 from the amalgamation of Kirkby College of Further Education (FE), Knowsley Central Tertiary College and the sixth forms of Kirkby schools. The college operates from two major centres in Roby and Kirkby and a specialist centre for training in land-based industries. Education and training ranges from entry level programmes to higher education. In addition to courses on the college sites and outreach, there is a large 14-16 programme forming part of the Knowsley Collegiate partnership. The college provides a training service for industry covering areas such as work-based learning, apprenticeship training and Train to Gain provision.

2. The majority of learners, of all ages, come from the Knowsley area with a high proportion of the remainder coming from Liverpool. The majority of learners are of White British heritage, reflecting the make up of the Knowsley area where minority ethnics form 1.6% of the population. Learners from minority ethnic groups make up just over 3% of enrolments. In 2006/07, there were 9,383 learners enrolled at the college. Most learners, aged 16-18 and 19+, are on entry level and level 1 courses, but there are also significant numbers on level 2 and 3 courses. The highest numbers of enrolments for both age groups are in sector subject area 14. There is a higher percentage of female than male learners at the college, particularly for learners aged 19+.

3. Census information shows that Knowsley is one of the most deprived areas in the country, with just over 50% of the population living in the 10% most deprived areas in England and Wales. There are high levels of unemployment, particularly including youth unemployment, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very high and 16% of the population have a limiting long-term illness. The level of skills and qualifications in the area is below the national average. The achievement of school leavers is below the national average for achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, and when mathematics and English are included, the local figure is 26.7% compared to a national figure of 46% for 2007. This places Knowsley at the bottom of national performance tables for this measure.

4. The college was designated a 'Beacon' college for quality and achievement by the DfES and awarded 'Beacon' status by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in October 2004. It is currently a pilot organisation for Framework for Excellence and has held Investor in People status since 1993. The college's mission is 'to work in partnership to improve learning, skills, aspirations and employability in our area'.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2

Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2

Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2

Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity	*Outstanding: Contributory Grade 1*

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision   Good: Grade 2

5. The effectiveness of provision is good. There is a very strong focus on partnership working and leading innovative developments to benefit the community. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The college has been refocusing its provision to meet developing local needs and national priorities. This had a negative impact on success rates in 2006/07, as new courses were embedding, particularly for adult learners. Many measures have been put in place to address the drop in success rates and they are beginning to have a positive effect but it is too early to see their full impact. Success rates and progression for 14-16 year old learners are good.

6. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good, with students making at least satisfactory progress in their studies and producing work of a high standard. The college has a clear view of the quality of teaching and learning and effective strategies to share good practice. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good and some aspects, such as social and educational inclusion are outstanding. The excellent partnership arrangements are highly effective in raising the profile of the college as an inclusive organisation, and in contributing locally to raising the employability of the workforce. The exceptional work undertaken with employers, schools and community partners is flexible, responsive and particularly successful in encouraging participation from disadvantaged backgrounds. The curriculum provides good progression opportunities for all age groups. Enrichment is wide ranging and the college has started to develop arrangements to raise the profile and review take up.

7. Support and guidance for learners are good, with a wide range of effective services that are focused on the learner. Tutors work well with learners, providing effective support to help them succeed. Additional learning support is very effective and evaluation shows the range of benefits it provides to learners. Leadership and management are good. Strategic leadership is strong, all staff are highly committed and work together very well with very effective communication. Self-assessment is accurate and quality assurance processes are well established and highly effective. However, targets are not used rigorously to drive and monitor improvements in success rates. The college is very responsive and plays a key role in many local initiatives. The promotion of equality of opportunity is excellent. Governance is good and the college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve   Good: Grade 2

8. The college's capacity to improve is good. The self-assessment process is inclusive and effective. It links well with course and service area self-assessments. Quality assurance processes are good. There is effective internal and external validation for the report, including partners from a peer referencing group. The self-assessment report is accurate and the

development plan provides a clear agenda for improvement. The views of stake holders, including, students are carefully considered. Learner achievement data is accurate and accessible. However, learner success rates particularly those for adult learners declined significantly in 2006/07. Targets are not used rigorously to bring about improvement in learner success rates. Action to improve underperforming courses is generally successful.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

9.   The college has made good progress in the areas identified as needing improvement at the last inspection, for example, success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices have improved and the college has introduced a very effective course recovery programme. There has been considerable investment in staff development across the college to improve teaching and learning, in particular in relation to information and learning technology (ILT) and differentiation. The college has invested in ILT resources, ILT is much more widely used and there is some innovative practice. The college intranet is widely used by students and by teachers to share good practice.

Key strengths

- innovative and responsive action to benefit the college and community
- excellent partnership arrangements
- good teaching, learning and support
- very good 14-16 provision
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- highly effective teamwork and communication
- strong strategic leadership.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- success rates
- further development of the management of enrichment
- more effective use of targets.

Main findings

Achievement and standards   Satisfactory: Grade 3

Contributory grades:
Learners aged 14-16   *Good: Grade 2*

10. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that achievement and standards are satisfactory. For 16-18 year old learners there has been a general improving trend over the last few years in success rates. In 2005/06, success rates were broadly in line with the national average. In 2006/07, the success rates for these learners improved at level 2, remained static at level 1 and declined at level 3. The college has identified the reasons for this pattern and has put strategies in place to address issues. Although it is too early to see their full effect there are already some signs of progress; for example, in improving retention on level 3 courses.

11. For adult learners there has been no clear trend in success rates over the past three years and in 2005/06, success rates were broadly in line with the national average. The college has refocused its adult provision and offered new courses to respond to the national agenda and local priorities, such as the increasing number of learners requiring support with literacy and numeracy. In 2006/07, there was a decline at all levels, which was most marked at levels 1 and 2, as these new programmes were embedding. Many initiatives have been put in place to deal effectively with these issues and are already showing some positive signs.

12. Overall 16-18 year old students on level 3 programmes make the progress expected of them, although many of them start the programme with lower than average prior attainment at GCSE. The distance travelled measure developed by the college shows that learners make good progress in achieving their personal targets, such as those related to attendance, meeting deadlines and motivation. Many learners produce work of a high standard and develop high levels of skills. Progression rates between levels are satisfactory and better.

13. There are large numbers of 14-16 year olds studying on a variety of college courses. They achieve well and there is a very high progression rate to further education, employment and training. Overall, success rates for work-based learning have improved over the last three years and are now satisfactory, although there are still variations between different sector subject areas. Progression from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships is strong. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory.

14. Success in achieving key skills qualifications has declined over the last three years and is now low. Numbers on courses have increased greatly and the college has put in place a wide ranging improvement programme that is

already showing some positive signs. Results in re-sits in mathematics and English at GCSE level have shown high levels of success rates.

15.   The attendance of learners has improved since the last inspection. Learners' behaviour is generally good; they enjoy their studies and have positive attitudes to health and safety. Learner achievement in all its forms is celebrated in a variety of ways. There are many examples of achievement, such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards and the success of the college radio, that reflect the positive contribution students make to the local community.

Quality of provision   Good: Grade 2

16.   Inspectors agree with the college's judgements in the self-assessment report on quality of provision. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the better lessons teachers use a range of highly effective techniques to provide good learning experiences and to develop skills. These include several innovative uses of ILT in the classroom. Teachers make good links between learners' personal or work experience and classroom theory. They give clear explanations in a timely manner and check understanding in a variety of ways. In the less effective lessons there is slow pace and lack of challenge for learners. Teaching in these lessons is didactic and there is insufficient learner activity or checking of learning. Most learners are enthusiastic and make satisfactory to good progress during lessons.

17.   A newly revised and thorough system of lesson observations is in place and this provides an accurate evaluation of teaching and learning. Joint observations carried out by inspectors and members of the college's internal observation team showed agreement on judgements. Teachers are well qualified and there is a good range of staff development. Good practice is shared well with regular 'Showcase' events used as a vehicle to observe good practice throughout the college, with teachers sharing with each other through a market stall approach. Good practice is also identified and promoted through the lesson observation process.

18.   The majority of assessment is good, with timely feedback to learners providing clear actions for improvement. In a minority of cases the feedback to learners is not detailed enough to support them in achieving higher grades or making good progress. Assessment in work-based learning is well planned with a good variety of evidence and clear recording. Progress reviews are well planned with clear target setting and monitoring.

19.   Resources for learning are good overall and very good in some areas. The study centres provide a good environment which is valued by learners as are the realistic working environments such as the restaurant and hair salons. However, some rooms are not well resourced and a few are too small. Improvements to key skills provision have recently been made. Several useful initiatives, including key skills project leader's posts to provide practical support for staff, have been put in place and key skills practitioners are working closely with sections to embed key skills into the vocational areas.

20.   The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners is good. The college provides a good range of accessible courses, especially for 16-18 year olds which promote progression across the levels, and into higher education. For adults, provision has been reduced but a number of innovative actions have been introduced to refocus provision; for example, on developing employability. Very good partnership working helps the college to be particularly effective in meeting the needs of learners and other stakeholders. Good and strong links with the community are being realised through bespoke learning programmes which help to widen participation.

21.   Staff involvement in partnership working is extensive, and stakeholders are highly complementary about the responsive, open and flexible approach by staff, and the positive outcomes of many of the initiatives. Good collaboration with local schools has established an increasing number of 14-16 year olds accessing courses at the college, and progressing further in education or employment. Innovative initiatives with employers have led to employer involvement in curriculum design and delivery, and are contributing effectively to improving the skills of the local workforce. Employers would value more forum meetings to have the opportunity to exchange information.

22.   There is a wide variety of cross-college and curriculum specific enrichment activities which help learners to experience and develop new skills. The recent appointment of an enrichment coordinator is helping to promote the profile of activities. There are no complete and established arrangements in place to review effectively the take up of activities at college or section level, and no current practice of sharing good ideas.

23.   Learners receive good and impartial information, advice and guidance from student services who are an integrated and responsive team. An extensive range of services is promoted effectively. They are focused clearly on the learners and used widely. Good links with external agencies make sure learners are referred appropriately for specialist help. A thorough induction programme ensures learners are on the right course, at the right level and aware of the requirements and expectations.

24.   The tutorial system is valued highly by the learners. Planned tutorial themes cover a range of relevant topics, many of which link closely to Every Child Matters themes. A wide range of good resource materials complement the tutorials. Tutors work well with learners in planning work and setting challenging individual targets. Individual learner progress and attendance are monitored effectively. Tutors provide effective and individualised academic and personal support to help learners succeed.

25.   Support for learners is very good. Additional learning support is timely and particularly effective. The number of learners identified as requiring additional learning support and the take up of this support are high. In class support is valued by many of the learners who recognise and appreciate its benefits. The quality of support is evaluated, and noted as having had a

positive impact on retention, success and learners gaining in personal confidence. Communication between tutors and learning support staff is effective.

Leadership and management   Good: Grade 2

Contributory grades:
Equality of opportunity   *Outstanding: Grade 1*

26. Leadership and management are good. The principal, senior managers and governors provide strong strategic direction and management for the college. Staff at all levels feel empowered and trusted to do their jobs well, service areas provide them with excellent support, and they respond effectively to new challenges. Strategic objectives are clear and appropriate and shared by staff. Development planning is effective. The college is very responsive to the needs of its local community and other stakeholders. Staff are involved in and provide leadership for many local and regional initiatives. New courses, initiatives and partnerships bring real benefits to the college and its staff and students.

27. Success rates, particulary those of adult learners, declined in 2006/07 as new provision was embedding. The college has set a target for improvement in success rates of 2% overall. Retention and pass rate targets are in place at course level but these have not been reconciled with the college target and targets are not used rigorously to drive and monitor improvements in success rates. A number of strategies, including a retention strategy, are in place to improve success rates at all levels. There are indications of improvement, retention has improved by 1%, but it is too early to measure the full impact of these actions.

28. The delivery of provision to employers has been integrated into curriculum areas. Management of work-based learning has improved, Train to Gain is being established well and apprentice success rates have improved. The extensive provision for students aged 14-16 is well managed. The Every Child Matters agenda is a high priority for the college.

29. Management information is clear, accessible and timely. The well established and highly effective quality improvement processes are based on rigorous self-assessment at course level. Performance at course level is closely monitored and there is clear evidence of improvement to the learners' experience. Recently introduced course recovery arrangements successfully ensure that underperforming curriculum areas improve. The college effectively shares good practice between curriculum areas, and is a key partner in a very successful peer referencing group of colleges. The self-assessment report is accurate. Close attention is given to the views of learners and staff. Learner representatives receive training to help them carry out their roles effectively.

30. Governors are very experienced; they are committed to the college and its community and engage well with college staff. They contribute very

effectively to the formation of policy and decisions about the college's strategic direction. They provide suitable challenge, and monitor college's financial performance well, but they monitor college's academic performance less rigorously.

31. Arrangements to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity are outstanding. Their management and promotion are a high priority. Policies and procedures are clear and reviewed regularly. Data are analysed thoroughly by gender, ethnicity and age. The college complies with the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2002. It has good arrangements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults, including a central register of the checks undertaken on staff, and meets current government requirements. There are very productive links with other agencies including the local safeguarding group. The college has critically evaluated and self-assessed its safeguarding procedures.

32. Staff are well trained. Appraisal is very effective as are staff development processes, including involvement in peer referencing. There is effective professional development and support for staff to develop and meet their full potential. Accommodation and learning resources are generally good with the college continually investing and improving them. The recently complete building project at Kirkby has significantly enhanced the learner's experience. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	04/05	1,534	56	62	-6	2,444	59	61	-2
	05/06	1,368	67	68	-1	2,488	66	67	-1
	06/07*	1,181	67			2,039	57		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	8	13	64	-51	…	…	…	…
	05/06	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
	06/07*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NVQs	04/05	71	48	66	-18	17	35	71	-36
	05/06	156	60	70	-10	116	83	72	11
	06/07*	161	79			111	74		
Other	04/05	1,455	57	61	-4	2,427	59	61	-2
	05/06	1,212	68	67	0	2,372	65	67	-2
	06/07*	1,020	66			1,928	56		

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	04/05	1,389	58	61	-3	1,349	56	60	-4
	05/06	1,142	62	65	-3	1,526	63	66	-3
	06/07*	1,075	65			1,763	57		
GCSEs	04/05	426	63	66	-3	107	50	64	-14
	05/06	377	69	69	0	97	59	67	-8
	06/07*	425	71			72	63		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	16	56	67	-11	26	42	65	-23
	05/06	22	50	66	-16	21	19	65	-46
	06/07*	50	32			54	43		
NVQs	04/05	379	54	56	-2	421	49	62	-13
	05/06	358	61	64	-3	587	63	69	-6
	06/07*	203	56			486	57		
Other	04/05	568	56	59	-3	795	61	58	3
	05/06	385	58	63	-5	821	66	65	1
	06/07*	397	67			1,151	58		

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	*Diff*	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	*Diff*
3 Long	04/05	1,597	71	66	5	941	56	57	-1
	05/06	1,490	71	68	3	821	61	62	-1
	06/07*	1,362	69			678	59		
A/A2 Levels	04/05	433	78	85	-7	74	73	74	-1
	05/06	324	88	86	2	49	82	74	8
	06/07*	307	82			48	79		
AS Levels	04/05	665	71	64	7	94	48	53	-5
	05/06	679	65	64	1	73	48	57	-9
	06/07*	743	65			87	52		
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	84	51	60	-9	12	25	52	-27
	05/06	47	43	68	-25	4	50	54	-4
	06/07*	14	36			2	50		
NVQs	04/05	73	47	54	-7	310	59	55	4
	05/06	42	67	66	1	291	68	65	3
	06/07*	28	79			344	60		
Other	04/05	342	70	57	13	451	53	57	-4
	05/06	398	70	62	8	404	55	62	-7
	06/07*	270	63			197	56		

* college data (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/ college NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate**	College framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	87	38	48	18	34
		timely	84	29	31	13	21
	05/06	overall	132	52	54	31	44
		timely	146	31	34	15	27
	06/07	overall	64	59	64	50	58
		timely	71	41	43	30	37
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	434	36	50	28	38
		timely	474	24	29	17	22
	05/06	overall	425	50	58	44	53
		timely	426	25	38	19	33
	06/07	overall	309	61	65	58	61
		timely	264	33	47	32	44

Note 'At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006/07 had yet to be fully validated'

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
** College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Table 5

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the college 2005/06 to 2006/07

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	College NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2005/06	overall	0	0
		timely	0	0
	2006/07	overall	83	65
		timely	0	0

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
** College/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
*** Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'