

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Milton Keynes

Date of visit: 12 June 2008

Context

Milton Keynes College was last inspected in November 2007. Six curriculum areas were inspected, five of which were judged satisfactory and one good. Overall effectiveness, achievement and standards and quality of provision were judged satisfactory, with leadership and management and capacity to improve judged good. The college has experienced a period of considerable growth, particularly in numbers of full-time students aged 16 to 18, where enrolments increased by 15% in 2007/08. The college continues to develop and expand its provision to meet the growth in population in Milton Keynes and the increasingly diverse needs of local people and employers.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in raising success rates further, and in reducing the variation in success rates between different curriculum areas?	Reasonable progress
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Overall success rates have improved markedly in the three years between 2004/05 and 2006/07, and were around the national average at the previous inspection in November 2007. College data for 2007/08 shows a further improvement in retention rates, which are 6% age points higher than at a similar point last year. This represents a faster rate of improvement than during the previous year. College data indicates that overall retention rates will be around 90% in 2007/08, which is 3% age points higher than the 2006/07 national average.

At the time of the visit, it was not possible to determine final success rates, but the college expects achievement rates to be at least in line with the previous year, when they were 91% overall. The college is currently on monitor to meet its targets for overall success rates of over 80%.

Senior managers have a very good understanding of the variation in success rates across different curriculum areas, and the underlying reasons. They acknowledge that some are making faster progress than others, but can identify specific improvements in all areas. They monitor progress and performance closely, through regular performance management meetings with section heads and team leaders.

This has helped to increase the responsibility and accountability of curriculum teams, who now have a better understanding of key performance issues and areas requiring further improvement. Managers at all levels are now better informed and are able to target areas requiring support or intervention. Well-focused actions are in place to secure improvements and there are early indications that these are having a positive impact.

What progress has been made in improving overall and timely success rates for work-based learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, framework completion rates were satisfactory, but timely completion rates were low. The college has taken successful action to improve overall and timely success rates in work-based learning. Curriculum managers have greater accountability and responsibility for work-based learning within their curriculum areas. Significant improvements to overall and timely success rates for advanced apprentices have increased these to well above the national rates for 2006/07. College data indicates that overall success rates will be 74%, with a timely success rate of 64% for advanced apprentices in 2007/08.

Improvements for apprenticeships, which represent most work-based learners, are satisfactory. Overall success rates are currently 61%, in line with the national rate in 2006/07. More learners are expected to complete their programmes during the next few weeks and the college predicts a final success rate of 68% for 2007/08. Timely success rates, at 43%, are well above the national rate for 2006/07, but are still too low.

Action to improve links between Entry to Employment (E2E) provision and other related college provision has been effective in improving provision for learners on these programmes. The success rate currently stands at 57%, with the expectation that it will rise to over 63% by September 2008. Recruitment to Train to Gain programmes is satisfactory. At 88%, the success rate on these programmes is good.

How much progress has the college made in raising key skills success rates?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, key skills success rates were low, but improving. This improving trend has continued, and in 2007/08, the college expects that success rates for key skills will be 55%, an increase of 10% age points from 2006/07. The college's strategy for provision of key skills is appropriate. It places particular emphasis on ensuring that learners are working towards the key skill that most meets their individual need. Key skills are integrated in curriculum delivery, with an expectation that they will be mapped carefully to curriculum activities in schemes of work and session plans. Staff are given training and support to enable them to delivery key skills. However, the strategy has not yet been successful in ensuring that key skills success rates match curriculum qualification success rates.

Quality of provision

How effective have strategies to increase the proportion of good and better teaching been?	Reasonable progress
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The college's internal lesson observation profile shows year on year improvement in the proportion of teaching judged good or better over the last three years. This has risen from 54% in 2005/06 to 70% in 2007/08. Approximately one-quarter of lessons observed were satisfactory and a small proportion judged inadequate. There has been a clearly focused plan for staff development and training to address areas for development identified through lesson observations. This year, the college has produced a very comprehensive and useful resource pack for teachers focusing on best practice. This provides guidance on the criteria for good and outstanding teaching as well as useful and practical examples of best practice. Findings from paired lesson observations and performance management meetings are being used well to encourage well-focused and targeted peer observation and sharing of good practice.

Senior managers acknowledge that there is still considerable variation in the proportion of good and better teaching in different curriculum areas, with a few curriculum areas well below the figure for the college overall. Clear strategies are in place to support improvement in those areas where the proportion of good and better teaching is lower. In several curriculum areas new team leaders have been recently appointed. A high number of teachers are currently undertaking teacher training. The college has appointed many new teachers this year, to meet the significant growth in student numbers and increasingly diverse curriculum offer.

Leadership and management

How effective have the college's strategies to improve success rates for students from black and minority ethnic heritage been? How well does the college analyse and use data on this?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the college's analysis of data for equality of opportunity was not sufficiently developed. Success rates for students from black and minority ethnic heritage groups were below the college's overall success rate. The college has taken effective action to improve these areas. Success rates for learners from most minority ethnic groups have improved and are now at, or close to the overall college rate.

The college now makes good use of data to identify aspects of provision or groups of learners that are underperforming. For example, it identified that, although success rates for learners from minority ethnic groups had improved, high grade success

rates had not. The college now provides specialist support for learners to promote their achievement. It reviews the curriculum and its delivery to ensure that it promotes equality and diversity. Equality and diversity are routinely discussed at management meetings and during regular performance reviews. A wide range of college events and activities are used well to promote equality and diversity. Groups of staff and students have been established to monitor and promote equality and diversity. A programme of mandatory staff training has been prepared. To date 85 of the college's 1,100 staff have been trained, with further training planned. The college's induction programme for staff includes a session on equality and diversity. The college has committed to achieving the Investors in Diversity standard.

To what extent has the college improved provision in those areas where declining performance was identified in 2006/07, for example, in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and arts and media?	Reasonable progress
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The college has further strengthened its quality improvement processes and monitoring of performance at curriculum level this year, through the inclusion of team leaders in regular performance management meetings and in events to share good practice. The moderation of curriculum self-assessment reports is rigorous and senior managers challenge judgements and supporting evidence.

There are tangible in-year improvements evident in both hairdressing and beauty therapy, and arts and media. Retention rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy have improved by 8% age points compared with the same time last year. There is a stronger focus on assessing students' progress and early identification and support for those at risk of underachieving, and managers have a better overview of the performance of each course and priorities for further improvements.

In arts and media retention rates have improved on almost all courses, significantly so on most national diploma courses, and pass rates are generally high. In both curriculum areas, the college has reviewed the structure and staffing needs and improved the balance of full-time and part-time staff to provide more coherent and consistent support for section leaders. Managers are aware that there is more to do to increase the proportion of good and better teaching in both areas and they have identified key aspects for development over the coming year.