

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Canterbury College

Date of visit: 30 September 2008

Context

Canterbury College is a general further education college (GFE) with a main campus situated close to the city centre of Canterbury. The college has a second campus on the Isle of Sheppey, known as Sheppey College. The college also operates from outreach and community venues in local towns. Phase two of its new build has been completed. It offers programmes from foundation to higher education level. Further education courses are provided in all sector subject areas. Work based learning is offered in 11 curriculum areas. At the previous inspection in November 2007 the college's overall effectiveness was judged to be satisfactory and capacity to improve and leadership and management were good. Equality of opportunity was satisfactory as were achievements and standards and the quality of provision.

Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving success rates of learners, particularly for those aged 16–18 enrolled on level 3 programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress in improving the success rates of its learners. Actions to improve success rates for 16–18 year olds have started to have an impact. The college has introduced a very effective 'red alert system' to prioritise action on courses where there are recognised performance issues. Where courses have continued with poor performance following a support package, these have been withdrawn. Heads of faculty are now more closely involved in monitoring withdrawals, and report this back to the senior management team. Tutors are now using the 'deep tracker' system effectively to monitor learners' attendance. The overall college attendance rate improved to 81% in 2007/08.

Having recognised the low achievement on some AS and A level courses, senior managers are currently reviewing level 3 provision. Success rates at level 3 for 16–18 year olds improved by 1% in 2007/08 but still remain below national rates. There are early signs of an improvement in retention rates at the end of the first year for level 3 learners starting a two year programme in 2007/08, compared with the same stage the previous year: 71% in 2006/07 and 81% in 2007/08. Overall success rates increased in 2007/08 for 16–18 year olds on level 1 programmes by 4% to 80% and

continue to be considerably above national rates. Success rates for learners aged 19 and over are above national rates at all levels.

The college recognised the issues impacting on success rates in engineering and construction areas and on the apprenticeship programmes. Success rates declined by 4% to 70% on the overall apprenticeship programme and timely success rates declined significantly to just below national rates. New managers have recently been appointed and staff have been trained to work with disaffected learners. It is too early to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Quality of provision

Has there been an improvement in the consistency of key skills delivery?	Reasonable progress
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The college has invested significantly in tutor development to support a more consistent delivery and assessment of key skills. Tutors have good access to a range of support mechanisms, including surgeries, support from co-ordinators and learning materials on the college's intranet and through the college's virtual learning environment. Key skills coordinators have taken a more structured approach to monitoring the quality of key skills throughout the year. Individual roles for tutors, coordinators and managers have been clearly stated within the key skills operational plan. Actions to improve the uptake of key skills have been successful and the number of entries for qualifications has more than doubled this year. Many learners are taking at least two key skills, including wider key skills. The college's own data shows an increase in achievement rates in 2007/08. There are sound examples of key skills being integrated well into vocational subjects. However in other areas this is less well developed and key skills are delivered as a separate subject. Central meetings are used well to share best practice, and there are plans to further develop this through the introduction of network meetings for tutors.

What progress has been made to ensure that assessment practices are consistent across all programmes?	Reasonable progress
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The college has taken appropriate actions and has made reasonable progress in improving assessment practices. Advanced practitioners have effectively supported tutors by monitoring the effect of recommendations from external verifiers and revising the lesson plan structure to encourage differentiation in teaching and learning. They also work well with assessors to develop feedback techniques. Assessors have received training through workshops and standardisation activities. A further 40 staff have achieved their assessor or verifier awards and some assessors have also gained literacy and numeracy qualifications. The college recognises further training is needed for tutors on giving feedback and this is planned for November. The college has taken specific actions within the sector subject areas where

inspectors identified assessment practice as an area for improvement. Successful initiatives have been shared between these areas where appropriate. More standardisation meetings by internal verifiers have been held, but this is not yet taking place across the college.

How well has the college improved the provision of work experience for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress in developing its work experience programme for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of employers the college is working with has increased significantly, rising from 23 in 2006/07 to 61 during 2007/08, and the trend is continuing this year with 72 employers providing external work experience for this group of learners. There was a rise of 17% of learners accessing cross-college internal work experience in 2007/08 and a significant rise of 75% during the same period who went out on external work placements. The numbers are continuing to rise this year. A variety of projects to assist with employability skills have been introduced, including a trial travel training project to assist learners in travelling safely to work placements. The college has been collaborating with specialist organisations and local colleges on a job coaching scheme with a focus on open and sustainable employment. Plans to assist an initial group of 14 learners are well advanced.

Leadership and management

How effective are measures taken by the college to raise the standard of teaching and learning?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in raising the standards of teaching and learning. The college has introduced a broad range of initiatives since the previous inspection. New staff receive enhanced support through an extended induction period. They receive support and guidance on developing schemes of work and lesson planning and advanced practitioners also undertake shadowing and observations of lessons. As part of staff appraisal, managers now include challenging targets for teaching and learning observation grades. Advanced practitioners have concentrated on supporting staff who have been graded 3 and 4 during teaching observations. Sharing of good practice is now a regular agenda item at weekly section management meetings with information being disseminated to tutors. The process of lesson observations is now viewed as a positive experience by tutors and as part of ongoing development opportunities. During 2007/08, 26% more observations were carried out than in the previous year. An 8% rise in the number of sessions graded good was recorded. An external consultant also recorded a similar improvement in the proportion of good sessions observed. A total of 32 tutors improved their grade from the previous year.

What progress has been made in promoting equality of opportunity within curriculum areas?	Reasonable progress
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There is an improved focus on raising awareness of equality and diversity issues across the college. Staff conferences for the past two years had a strong focus on equality and diversity. All staff are required to attend an initial mandatory session with additional optional workshops available. The main thoroughfare of the new building was used very effectively for a 'Fair for all' week last year which is planned to be repeated this year. The event included a good range of workshops, demonstrations and information. The college also puts on specialist events throughout the year. It is soon to hold an event to highlight and demonstrate the range of assistive technologies for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as part of the College's 'aim higher' focus. Tutors are now expected to record equality and diversity aspects within schemes of work and lesson plans. However, these vary in quality. The college has also recently introduced an equality and diversity section within teaching and learning observation records. An interactive online equality and diversity training programme has been customised for the college and is to be introduced at next month's staff conference.