

Suffolk New College

Reinspection report

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| Provider reference | 130820 |
| Published date | 11/11/2008 |

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Introduction

Suffolk College was inspected in February 2006. Inspectors carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in science and mathematics which was found to be inadequate. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is inadequate.

The less than satisfactory curriculum area was re-inspected on 1-2 October 2008. The outcomes of the reinspection are as follows.

| | Original grade | Reinspection grade |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Science and mathematics | 4 | 3 |

Context

The college provides science and mathematics courses at GCE AS and A-level to some 145 learners, two-thirds of whom are aged 16 to 18 and studying full time. Enrolments on these courses have nearly halved since the previous inspection. Nearly all of the 136 learners who follow full time GCSE courses are aged 16-18. Two-thirds of the learners who follow part-time courses in science and mathematics are adults.

Strengths

- Good range of learning activities in lessons
- Good management of improvement

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates for learners aged 16-18 in GCSE mathematics
- The minority of lesson plans which do not address the needs of different learners.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are now satisfactory. Success rates in nearly all GCE AS and A-level subjects have improved and are now mostly at, or slightly above national averages.. Success rates in GCSE science have also improved. Adult learners have maintained a very high success rate in GCSE mathematics, but the rate for 16-18 year old learners has not improved significantly since the previous inspection and remains low. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory overall but is good in chemistry.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning have improved and are now satisfactory. Teachers provide a good range of learning activities in lessons and use information learning technology confidently and effectively to make lessons more interesting. The quality of planning is variable. A minority of lesson plans do not make it clear how activities are to be differentiated to cater for the needs of all learners. The curriculum includes courses in only four different AS and GCE A-level subjects, which restricts learners' choice. There are good opportunities for learners to participate in enrichment activities. Support for learners is good.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. Managers have a sharper focus on performance monitoring and use targets more effectively to help raise standards. Lesson observations and staff development have been used to good effect to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Sharing of good practice is effective

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Suffolk New College

Date of visit: 1-2 October 2008

Context

Suffolk New College is a large general further education college which is located in the centre of Ipswich but serves a wide catchment area in south Suffolk. The majority of its provision is further education funded by the Learning and Skills Council. There are also Foundation Degrees in the Built Environment funded through the Higher Education Funding Council and a programme of adult and community learning which is currently provided on behalf of Suffolk Learning and Skills Council. The college offers programmes in all sector subject areas with the exception of agriculture, horticulture and animal care. In 2007, the college enrolled 4,408 learners, of whom 56% were aged 16-18 years and were following full-time courses. Half of these were studying at Level 3. Some 22% of adult learners enrolled on full-time courses, mostly at Level 3, with the majority of part-time adult learners following courses at Level 2. Nearly 200 learners were following work-based learning programmes and a similar number of learners aged 14-16 attended the college to follow courses leading to foundation or NVQ Level 1 qualifications.

Achievement and standards

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| Have the improvements in success rates identified at the previous monitoring visit maintained? | Reasonable progress |
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The college's current achievement data have yet to be validated by the Learning and Skills Council but indicate that success rates are continuing to improve steadily on long courses for all learners. The college has met its target for success rates for learners aged 16-18 and exceeded its target for adult learners. The improving trend is demonstrated at all levels, but gains have been more significant in some areas than others. For adult learners, success rates are well above the most recently published national averages at all levels. For learners aged 16-18, gains have been more modest. However, the college has maintained the significant progress made in GCE A-level success rates identified at the previous monitoring visit. Current data indicate an improvement of 6% in 2007/08 to well above the most recent national average. The latest value added analysis confirms that GCE A-level learners make good progress in relation to their starting points.

Success rates for work-based learners have also improved but the college has not met its target for 2007/08, and the level of achievement remains slightly below average.

Pupils from local schools who attend the college as part of their Key Stage 4 provision do extremely well. College data indicate a success rate of 84% in 2007/08, an improvement of 4%.

Attendance in 2007/08 increased to 88% but the college knows that this rate requires further improvement.

Quality of provision

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| What progress has been made with the implementation of the skills for life strategy? | Reasonable progress |
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Since the last monitoring visit, the college has simplified its skills for life strategy and concentrated on identifying clear actions to develop its taught provision. The new skills for life team, led by an assistant principal, is directing the strategy and monitoring its impact. The team have been successful in raising the profile of skills for life, including key skills, throughout the college. However the college has yet to develop an approach to this provision which impacts on all aspects of its business or produce an implementation plan for the current academic year.

Each curriculum area now has a skills for life champion; they have begun to meet regularly to share experience and exchange good practice. New skills for life specialists have been appointed to improve teaching. The assessment and diagnostic testing of learners now takes place within curriculum areas. This gives course teams the opportunity to respond quickly to learners' needs and place them on an appropriate level of course. However, as at the time of the last monitoring visit, success rates in key skills at Level 2 remain significantly lower than those for Level 1 and are below the national figure. The college has responded positively to the local need for English for speakers of other languages programmes but funding constraints mean that demand cannot be fully met.

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| What progress has the college made with improving the monitoring of the effectiveness of additional learning support? | Reasonable progress |
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The college now routinely collects information on the performance of learners who receive additional learning support but the data could be improved still further by identifying the number of learners who have chosen to accept or reject the support offered to them. The data indicate that learners who are in receipt of support achieve at least as well as those who do not receive support. This reflects improvements in the management of learning support. Curriculum area managers have been given a more prominent role, for example in the management of learning support assistants. This helps the assistants to develop a greater understanding of the curriculum and

learners' needs in the areas they work in, so helping to build their confidence and enabling them to contribute more effectively to enabling learners to improve their work. Each curriculum area has a link tutor who co-ordinates its work with that of the central services team.

At the end of the last academic year, the college gathered learners' views about the additional support they had received. This produced a mixed response from learners with some finding it more valuable than others. The college has yet to incorporate these views into a plan for further improvement.

Leadership and management

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| What progress has the college made with incorporating the views of learners in its work? | Reasonable progress |
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The new 'student involvement strategy' provides a clear statement of the college's objectives and gives greater potential coherence to the activities which make up its response to incorporating the views of learners. The appointment of two student sabbatical officers in September 2008 is an innovative feature. The two officers are also members of the full corporation and sit on the academic standards committee.

The operation of the student parliament has been improved. Plans to provide further training to course representatives are in place and their work is further strengthened through their attendance at half termly course meetings. Course representatives take their responsibilities seriously and cite examples, such as the modification of course timetables and providing access to sports and recreational activities, where their representation has been successful. Student forums operate through each curriculum centre and result in action plans for improvement. The recording of the activities of some student forums is more effective than that in others.

The college provides a good range of questionnaires to gather learners' views and analyses the results carefully. They demonstrate learners' good and improving levels of satisfaction with their experiences at college. However, students say that they are unaware of the results of the surveys. The use of an early leaver's survey has been useful in helping the college to identify the reasons when learners withdraw from their courses before completing them. Questionnaires do not currently provide the college with sufficient feedback on how effectively it is promoting the five *Every Child Matters* themes.

The college complaints procedures are comprehensive and provide another important source of information on learners' satisfaction. Records of actions demonstrate that complaints are dealt with quickly and sympathetically.

Learners know about and understand the ways that the college seeks their views and feel that their views are known, and acted upon by the college.

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| How successfully are targets being identified and used to improve learner performance? | Reasonable progress |
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The good access that managers have to data, which was identified in the previous monitoring report, is now having a greater impact on target-setting procedures.

Although there are variations between subject areas, course targets are generally clear and monitored more thoroughly than previously. Termly meetings are held between curriculum heads and senior post holders in which targets at curriculum centre level are agreed and subsequently reviewed. The performance of courses and individual learners is reviewed at six weekly intervals. Learners who are causing concern have action plans to support their improvement. In some practical sessions, for example hairdressing, teachers give learners effective short-term targets which help learners understand their progress. Performance against targets varies between different aspects of the college's business but the college meets the majority of targets it sets.