

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Wirral Metropolitan College

Date of visit: 13 January 2009

Context

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual monitoring visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance. Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in May 2007. The quality of provision was satisfactory or better in all areas inspected. Key strengths and areas for improvement were:

Key strengths

- Good achievement on many adult courses
- Outstanding provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- Strong focus on the learning needs of the local community through many positive partnerships
- Good guidance and support for learners
- Clear agenda to address quality improvement
- Well managed improvements to accommodation

Areas for improvement

- Poor success rates on a significant number of courses for learners aged 16 to 18 years old between 2003 and 2006
- Poor key skills achievement
- a lack of variety in teaching and learning methods to meet the needs of all learners
- The setting and monitoring of challenging targets to ensure learners make optimum progress
- Unevenness of performance and impact across the college of quality assurance procedures

The college has directly targeted the vocational training and education market and its curriculum continues to focus on skills for life, employability and work. The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence status for both health and social care, and construction. Since the last monitoring visit in March 2008, the college has continued to focus on developing strategic partnerships, targeting under-represented groups and engaging young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). An extensive needs analysis and consultation has been carried out to support the submission of an application in principle for a new build with a target completion of 2011.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve long course success rates? How effective have these actions been?	Reasonable progress
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The monitoring visit in 2008 judged the college to have made significant progress in improving success rates for 16 to 18 year olds at levels 1, 2 and 3, although they remained below national averages at levels 1 and 2. Success rates on long courses continued to improve during 2007/08 by four percentage points at level 1, by eight points at level 2, and by six points at level 3. Success rates are now broadly in line with national averages.

Success rates for learners aged 19 years and over on long courses also continued to improve during 2007/08 by two percentage points at level 1, four points at level 2, and seven points at level 3. At level 1, success rates are in line with national averages whilst levels 2 and 3 are above national averages.

The senior management team continues to have a very clear focus and strong determination to improve success rates of all learners through weekly rigorous monitoring of retention and achievement data. The college makes rigorous use of data in the self-assessment process to judge its performance and has a clear understanding of those programme areas or courses where it judges performance to be unsatisfactory. Challenging improvement targets continue to underpin thorough action planning for improvement.

What actions have been taken to improve key skills success rates? How successful have these actions been?	Significant progress
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The college has placed considerable emphasis on improving key skills success rates. The monitoring visit in 2008 judged the college to have made reasonable progress in improving the success rates to above low national averages. Success rates continued to improve between 2006/07 and 2007/08 with a significant further increase at both levels 1 and 2. During that period, level 1 success rates improved by 27 percentage points to 75%; while level 2 success rates improved by 19 points to 65%. Success rates are significantly above national averages for 2007/08. The college has set clear and challenging targets for further improvements in 2008/09.

All prospective learners at the college receive initial assessment of literacy and numeracy needs. Learners have a good understanding of the purpose of the assessment and of their outcomes and resulting learning plans. Key skills delivery is well integrated into the curriculum and managed by programme areas. Each programme area has a dedicated co-ordinator and key skills team that meet regularly for standardisation activities and to share good practice. A variety of differentiated

learning activities have been developed and are used to challenge and engage learners.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve target setting for learners and to monitor learners' performance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has a clear focus on improving target-setting. Learning and teaching champions work closely with programme teams and individuals to support improvement in target-setting. During 2007/08, 53 personal tutors received training on target-setting. Observations of tutorials were carried out to identify areas for improvement. In the current year, 43 personal tutors have received training. Plans are in place to provide more specific training for programme teams during the spring term.

The revised learner review document provides a clear opportunity for the identification of key issues that impact on each learner as well as to record their progress. The sample of learner files reviewed identified that in some instances this is used well. The review indicates an improvement in many targets that are now clear and measurable. There are still some targets that are too broad and not sufficiently specific. Learners report that they are making good progress in their programmes. The college is planning to implement moderation meetings during 2009 to review targets.

How much progress has been made to further develop the curriculum offer? How effective has this been?	Significant progress
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The college has a clear focus on identifying and meeting the needs of local employers, disadvantaged young people and the development of strategic partnerships. For example, the college has developed a strategic link with Wirral Partnership Homes (WPH). The link involves providing training and development for WPH's employees and a programme to target and engage young people in the NEET group and who are resident in WPH's housing.

In April 2008, the college introduced Personal Community Development Learning (PCDL) for up to 500 learners. The college is part of a well established Wirral wide strategy group. There are good links with the local authority and local community groups to identify needs and establish community programmes. A full-time community network manager provides support for this provision. The PCDL funding continues in 2008/09.

The college is introducing five of the new diplomas for learners aged 14 to 19 in September 2009, including information and communication technology, health and social care, engineering, business and construction.

The college has a clear and successful focus on promoting improvement in the curriculum. A Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) pilot has just started. Level 1 programmes are now offered across the curriculum areas. A review and development of level 3 and 4 programmes is ongoing. For example, hair and beauty level 3 provision is now offered in the evening. As part of a strategy to support the reduction in NEET, prospective learners will have four opportunities in the year to access courses. In September 2008, a central assessment centre was introduced for all potential full-time learners. This involved assessment of literacy and numeracy and an opportunity to establish additional support needs before learners attended an interview for a place at the college. An enhanced six-week induction was introduced across the college in September 2008 and provides learners with an opportunity to sample programmes. Overall retention has improved from 88% in 2006/07 to 91% in 2007/08. Achievement data shows an overall improving trend.

The detailed 2007-2012 curriculum strategy has recently been revised to incorporate the college's contribution to the local economy. Governors are closely involved in the review and development of the strategy. A useful one-page summary is now included which outlines the planned development across the eight areas of the strategy. The college has mapped the change across curriculum areas since 2005/06 and has clearly identified areas of curriculum change and the impact of local and national agendas until 2010/11.

Leadership and management

How effectively do quality improvement activities impact across all areas of the curriculum? How is the extent of impact measured?	Significant progress
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The quality improvement framework is now well established. Each curriculum area has a comprehensive self-assessment and quality improvement plan that is supported by detailed trend data. There is a very clear focus on improving courses identified as underperforming. The senior management team reviews achievement and retention data weekly and carries out two performance reviews annually for each programme area. Since May 2008, programme team managers carry out a termly team review which focuses on achievement data and progress against targets. Data indicates that success rates at all levels and age groups show an improving trend.

The college continues to develop the teaching and learning observation process and the current focus is on sessions identified as satisfactory. In 2007/08, 17% of sessions were judged satisfactory with very few inadequate sessions. Since November 2008, tutors are now given three weeks notice that observations will take place within a two day period rather than, as previously, an identified session. Tutors judged as satisfactory through the observation process now have an individual action planning session with a learning and teaching champion and follow-up coaching support. The aim is to support improvement from satisfactory to good.

<p>What actions have been taken to promote equality and diversity across the college? How is the extent of impact measured?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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Equality and diversity is given a high priority in the college. The Principal chairs the equality and diversity committee, which meets regularly to monitor progress. The board of governors includes a disability equality champion. A teaching and learning champion provides a cross-college focus on equality and diversity. Project groups, including the 'blind and partially sighted' and the 'deaf and hard of hearing' groups, focus on dealing with specific aspects within the college.

The relative performance of different groups of learners is monitored rigorously at senior management, programme area and individual course levels. In 2007/08, over 500 learners received additional learning support with performance analysis showing good comparisons against other college cohorts and national averages. The performance of males and females indicates no significant difference. At four percentage points, the college population from black and minority ethnic groups compares favourably with the 2% for the Wirral area, as does their performance. Developments include the use of cream paper to support a range of visual impairments and specific learning difficulties. The college produces policies in an easy-to-read format. There are some particularly good examples of learners benefiting from the use of assistive technology.

The college has a strong ethos of celebrating the success of learners. The college magazine is effective in highlighting equality and diversity success stories and in raising awareness of aspects of equality and diversity. The enrichment programme includes a good range of cross-college events to raise awareness of diversity and cultural differences. Learners with disabilities have been effectively involved in staff training, for example in raising staff awareness of the impact of sight impairment.

Good curriculum progression opportunities are being developed for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners with discrete GCSE provision in mathematics, English and science, information technology for ESOL classes and numeracy levels 1 and 2. One ESOL assessor works across the college to provide assessment for prospective learners and to identify appropriate support.