MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Thurrock Borough Council
Date of visit: 28 January 2009

Context

Thurrock Borough Council contracts with Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the provision of part-time adult education which it offers through Thurrock Adult Community College (the college). At its inspection in February 2008 the effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management were inadequate. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) and arts, media and publishing were satisfactory. Provision in preparation for life and work and in family learning were inadequate

The provision is offered at three adult education centres and a school in the unitary local authority area of Thurrock. The college uses 38 other community venues periodically. During 2007/08, 1608 learners followed 291 non accredited courses in personal and community development and learning and 690 learners followed 92 further education courses leading to external accreditation.

The principal manages the college with a leadership team of a vice-principal, an assistant principal, and a finance and administrative manager. The principal reports to the governing body of the college. The vice-principal has been appointed since the previous inspection.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving overall success rates?	Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection success rates were inadequate. The college did not have reliable data on success in non-accredited provision. Since then the college has introduced new systems for data collection and monitoring. Data are now more accurate and readily available. The understanding and use of data at curriculum level has improved. These improvements have only been implemented since September 2008.

On further education level 1 long courses, which make up nearly half the provision, success rates have risen to 78% in 2007/08, an increase of 12 percentage points

over 2006/07. Success rates on level 2 long courses at 67% in 2007/08 show a modest improvement from 2006/07, but still remain below national averages. Short course success rates are below national averages and have decreased slightly since 2006/07, particularly at level 2. Retention rates on non-accredited provision have remained consistent at 95%.

What progress has been made in monitoring and improving attendance?	Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection attendance was poor and monitoring of attendance rates was inadequate. Since then the college has thoroughly reviewed its arrangements for monitoring and recording attendance and these are now appropriate. Managers now have timely and accurate information on attendance by individuals and overall. They use the information routinely to identify trends and where intervention is needed. For example in Neighbourhood Learning for Deprived Community provision, managers have identified that attendance dips consistently in the fourth week of five week courses. The college has now introduced measures to remedy this. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of improved monitoring on attendance rates across the college.

Quality of Provision

What processes have been implemented to improve the provision in literacy, numeracy and language and what is the impact on the learner	Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection the implementation of strategies to improve literacy, numeracy and language was slow. Since then, the college has appointed a new curriculum manager and put in place a new staffing structure. The college is taking appropriate steps to develop staff expertise. Most tutors are working towards subject specialist teacher training qualifications at level 5 with college support. Formal and informal mentoring arrangements enable them to discuss their learning and progress. Tutors have attended a number of short professional development courses on, for example, supporting dyslexic learners. A programme of good practice visits to other colleges enables tutors to observe good lessons. They share their reports of these observations at team meetings. At the college, observations of teaching and learning are more thorough and regular. Action points from these observations are recorded and managers closely monitor improvement which follows. Managers now also monitor the quality of individual learning plans. It is too early to assess the impact of improvement on learners as yet.

How effective is monitoring of learners progress in non accredited provision?	Insufficient progress

A key area for improvement identified at previous inspection was the process for monitoring learners' progress and achievement in the non-accredited provision. The college has redesigned the individual learning record and adapted it to meet the

specific needs of learners in each curriculum area. It now includes space for personal aims, individual and group outcomes, and a record of skills learnt and developed.

Curriculum managers make effective use of student achievement records to monitor the overall progress of each class. A moderation process aims to ensure consistency of practice across the college Tutors have received comprehensive training and written guidance on recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA). In curriculum areas staff now identify and share good practice in RARPA at meetings. However, these initiatives are very recent. The colleges recognises that RARPA remains weak on many programmes, and data from RARPA on learner outcomes is not yet reliable

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning especially in literacy, numeracy and language	Reasonable progress

The quality of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and language was identified as unsatisfactory at the previous inspection. Since then the college has invested significantly in developing staff expertise. Tutors now make better use of individual learner records to plan learning for individuals and groups and in monitoring individual learners' progress. Tutors use a wider range of resources and computer-based interactive learning materials. Staff teams meet regularly to share both new practice and resources. Tutors have a better understanding of how to work effectively with volunteer assistants in the classroom. Although some staff have started to contextualise the content of sessions to better meet the needs and interests of their learners, this is not yet fully established. Information on learners collected at the initial assessment interview is not sufficiently used in target-setting. Tutors do not make sufficient use of learners' background, experience and goals to identify the language skills they need to improve. Managers do not monitor the quality of lesson plans sufficiently.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What strategies have been implemented to drive forward the quality improvement process?	Reasonable progress

Self-assessment and quality improvement systems have improved since the introduction in September 2008 of new processes. These include the observation of teaching and learning, regular course reviews and the better use of data. The college's quality improvement plan links effectively to the post-inspection action plan and self-assessment. The college now sets clear targets against which it assesses improvement. Observation of teaching and learning across the college focuses effectively and consistently on specific themes. Programme evaluation is continuous and leads to improvement. When carrying out self-assessment staff now base judgements effectively on evidence from sources such as data on learner success. A revised format for self-assessment includes judgements under each key question of the common inspection framework at curriculum area and whole college level. The strengths and areas for improvement identified are suitably evaluative.

Staff now clearly understand the role and purpose of quality systems. The college has made good use of external expertise to confirm the reliability of its self-assessment report.