

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Calderdale College

Date of visit: 21 January 2009

Context

The college is a medium size general further education college and is the sole provider of further education within Calderdale. The college serves a diverse local community including several small rural settlements. There are pockets of severe deprivation in the area. It delivers programmes in most sector subject areas with courses available from pre-entry level to degree level. It also offers apprenticeships and work-based provision to adults. The college recruited about 930 full-time and 400 part-time students aged 16 to 18 and 530 full-time and 3,600 part-time students in 2007/08. About 13% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 6% representation in the local community.

Most schools in the authority have sixth forms and there are two sixth form colleges within 10 miles. The proportion of school leavers attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics was slightly above the national average in 2008.

Calderdale College was inspected in November 2007 when its overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory. It was judged to have a good capacity to improve and its quality of provision was also judged as good. Achievements and standards and leadership and management were judged satisfactory. The college has had three principals in the last 18 months. One was an interim appointment in the period September 2007 to March 2008. The self-assessment report (SAR) notes that this has slowed the pace of the improvement required. Only one new set of success rates, from the year of the inspection, has been completed since the inspection.

Achievement and standards

What progress is the college making in raising success rates?	Insufficient progress
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The success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult students have improved in line with the national averages for similar colleges for several years. Both rates have been below the national average for similar colleges in each of the three years to 2008. Neither rate places the college clearly in the bottom quartile of similar colleges by these measures.

The success rates by level for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses show:

- At level 1 the rate lost ground to the national average in 2008 and was below average in this year, though not clearly in the bottom quartile.
- At level 2 the rate has gained steadily on the national average and in 2008 was at the national average.
- At level 3 the rate has gained markedly on the national average but still remains below average.

The success rates by level for adults on long courses show:

- At level 1 the rate has been in the bottom quartile in both 2007 and 2008.
- At level 2 the rate fell in 2008 to a position close to but not clearly in the bottom quartile.
- At level 3 the rate has been high in each of the three years to 2008.

Apprenticeship framework success rates remained broadly at the national average in 2008.

Students aged 16 to 18 who completed level 3 courses in 2008 made outstanding progress compared with their attainment at level 2. For example, students undertaking national diplomas made progress which placed them within the top quartile of schools and colleges. Recently published contextual value-added data also shows outstanding progress across all level 3 qualifications undertaken by students aged 16 to 18 completing their level 3 programmes in 2008. The average points score per student for this cohort is markedly higher than that for similar cohorts in previous years. This cohort is a small proportion of the students at the college.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made to improve the tutorial provision at the college	Reasonable progress
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The college has reviewed and strengthened its students' entitlement framework and renamed it 'Passport to Success'. There is a greater emphasis on ensuring students attend all activities and lessons related to the entitlement. For example, progress review meetings between a student and their tutor look more closely at the progress being made, not only in vocational lessons but also in key skills lessons and other enrichment activity. Group tutorial activity is now tailored more closely to the needs of the different vocational areas. Tutorial co-ordinators are helping to ensure there is a greater consistency and participation in the provision across the college, an area for improvement noted at the previous inspection. Learner involvement officers are helping to ensure enrichment activity is more relevant to students in different vocational areas.

Individual progress reviews are being conducted with increased rigour and closer working with parents and carers is evident where this is appropriate. A variation in the quality of individual reviews exists, for example for part-time students, and some of the action plans resulting from review discussions for both full-time and part-time students are not sufficiently precise to be useful. Learner review weeks, which occur at the end of each term, have a more structured content in order that each student can gain more from them.

Leadership and management

What progress is being made in identifying underperformance and making improvement	Reasonable progress
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Performance management of the provision has improved. Middle managers are undertaking a management development programme. Performance review meetings at programme area level are more structured and there is increasing rigour in the way data is used. Provision which is deemed of only satisfactory quality receives an internal notice to improve and receives enhanced monitoring. Course management is now more consistently implemented and there is greater clarity in the roles of course leaders. Courses that are underperforming significantly are noted in the college SAR, receive close monitoring and a range of improvement strategies implemented.

What progress is being made to improve the college's quality assurance systems	Reasonable progress
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The evidence to support the judgements in the curriculum SARs is extensive and is now marshalled well. Data management continues to be strong. Moderation arrangements have been strengthened.

The observation of teaching and learning system identifies areas for improvement clearly. However, these areas are not considered at the next observation in order that evidence of improvement can be identified. The observation records perused said too little about the quality of the learning or the standards being attained in the lesson, concentrating too much on teaching strategies.

The judgements contained in the college SAR and the curriculum SARs are largely accurate and supported well by the evidence which is broadly based and well marshalled. The college SAR, for example, identifies correctly that it is retention for students aged 16 to 18 and pass rates for adults that are the major issues facing the college in respect of student achievements. A three-year raising achievement strategy is being implemented by course teams to tackle this. As yet, it has not had sufficient impact. In some areas of the SAR, terms such as 'inconsistency' mask exactly where areas for improvement lie and strengths are sometimes attributed to norms, for example improvements in line with national averages.