

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Wirral Metropolitan College

Date of visit: 12 March 2008

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 found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected. Key strengths and areas for improvement were:-

Key strengths

- o good achievement on many adult courses
- o outstanding provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- o strong focus on the learning needs of the local community through many positive partnerships
- o good guidance and support for learners
- o clear agenda to address quality improvement
- o well managed improvements to accommodation.

Areas for improvement

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

In March 2006, the college revised its mission and vision. The new mission is "We will enhance the economic prosperity of young people, adults and employers through high quality, work-related education and training". The college has directly targeted the vocational training and education market and its curriculum focus has shifted to skills for life, employability and work. The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence status for both health and care,

and construction. The college is currently reviewing its accommodation strategy.

Achievement and standards

How successful have actions been to improve the success rates of learners aged 16-18? What is the impact of leadership and management on success rates?	Significant progress
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College information indicates that success rates for learners aged 16-18 improved significantly at all levels in 2006/07. Level 1 success rates improved by 11 percentage points and level 2 by 13 points, but success rates are still below national average. At level 3, success rates improved by 16 points and are now at national average. Action has been taken to improve both retention and achievement rates.

The principal and the directorate have a very clear focus and strong determination to improve success rates of all learners and in particular those of learners aged 16-18. Challenging targets have been set these and shared with all staff. Staff take ownership for success rates within their areas of responsibility; at course and department level. Overall college targets are set at 9 percentage points above the 2005/06 national average.

Managers rigorously monitor the achievement of targets at course and college level and for all learners, though those for 16-18 get closest attention. The principal and directorate monitor retention and attendance weekly. Course teams predict which learners will achieve and regularly monitor progress against these predicted success rates.

Governors monitor academic performance of the college rigorously. There is a standard agenda item "improving learner performance of 16-18". Reports are detailed and clearly identify areas for improvement and provide governors with appropriate information.

There are clear strategies to drive improvement in 16-18 success rates including: a retention strategy, use of student mentors to retain students, improved initial advice and guidance, improved induction, use of taster courses which have arisen from sharing good practice originating in construction and restructuring of courses in some departments.

Managers use data effectively to monitor performance and there are a number of very clear and useful charts and graphs which present the information clearly and visually. At the time of the visit, college information indicated that the college was on track to achieve its targets.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to improve key skills success rates and how successful have these actions been?	Reasonable progress
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Key skills success rates have improved over the last three years, from 17% in 2004/05, 27% in 2005/06 (below national benchmark of 37%), to 46% in 2006/07. The college recognises that the national benchmark is low for success rates in key skills and has set targets and implemented action plans for further improvement. There is a clear focus on embedding key skills within a vocational context and key skills staff are now located in the curriculum areas and managed by the programme team manager. There is an increased emphasis on using initial assessment to ensure that learners are placed on the relevant level of key skills programme.

How successful has the college been in ensuring that teaching and learning meets the needs of all learners? How effective have observation of teaching and learning and staff development been in bringing about improvement?	Significant progress
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The college has a clear and successful focus on promoting improvement in teaching and learning. Observation processes are thorough and the college monitors the grades of lesson observations. Since the last inspection, detailed team staff development plans have been introduced which review observation and performance for teams and identify specific staff development requirements. The role of the learning and teaching champions now includes a quality responsibility. Staff are well supported to improve their teaching, in addition to specific staff development learning and teaching champions carry out supportive observations of teaching and learning for those teachers graded satisfactory (or less) at observation, they coach teachers and monitor actions and improvements through re-observation. Cross-college staff development events in October and February focused specifically on teaching and learning. Peer observation is used effectively to promote sharing of good practice. A database of all elements of good practice in teaching and learning is used to identify and share good practice.

<p>Has the college improved target setting for learners and monitoring of learners' performance? What impact has this had and are learners now making good progress in achieving their aims?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college has increased the focus on target setting through the observation of teaching and learning. Where target setting is identified as an area for development, staff are provided with staff development or individual support from the enrichment and tutorial manager or a learning and teaching champion. The sample of learner files analysed identified that some learner targets remain vague and insufficiently precise. Some tutor comments are descriptive rather than an evaluation of progress, while others clearly identify progress or development of learners' skills.

In the information and communication technology department where target setting was an area for improvement at the last inspection, the learning and teaching champion has introduced a standardisation process. This included useful staff development on target setting as well as a review of a sample of targets. However, it is too recent to judge the impact of this.

Leadership and management

<p>Do quality improvement activities impact across all areas of the curriculum? How is the extent of impact measured?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The college now implements three levels of intervention strategy to support curriculum areas. This traffic light system is a very effective approach for monitoring provision and for targeting resources and effort into support where it is most needed. All courses have appropriate strategies and targets for improvement, based on current performance and local circumstances. Systems for sharing of good practice are improving and there are some very effective systems in place.

Three new Curriculum Cluster Managers support curriculum areas. They are experienced practitioners who share good practice and coordinate curriculum. Their roles formalise previous arrangements of pairing curriculum areas to bring about improvement. Recent improvements include a restructuring of the applied science diploma. These managers do not have direct line management for the areas in their cluster. Learning and teaching champions also identify good practice and transfer it in a targeted and managed way.

There is still some variation in practice. For example, the occupational studies self assessment lacks evidence, as noted at moderation of the report. The college has introduced some very useful aids to measuring impact, such as the quality dashboard, to standardise practice, ensure compliance in quality assurance activities and drive forward success rates.

How successful is the post inspection action plan in bringing about improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The college's clear vision, shared by staff, is to be 'Outstanding' and it is working to become the first choice provider of vocational skills training and education on the Wirral peninsula. The self assessment report is self critical and evaluative. The summary clearly focuses attention on college strengths and areas for improvement. The overall SAR is supported by detailed reports at department and course level. The improvement plan is detailed and there is already evidence of impact and improvement. Many staff report positive changes in the culture of the college. Management set high standards, but is open and supportive. Staff are encouraged to identify and implement improvements in the move to become outstanding.