

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Waltham Forest College

Date of visit: 11 June 2009

Context

Waltham Forest College is a large general further education college within the area of the London North Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The London Borough of Waltham Forest is extremely diverse with areas of relative prosperity and other wards amongst the 10% most deprived in the country. In 2007/08 the proportion of Year 11 learners in the Borough who achieved grade C or above in five GCSE subjects was 55%. Many learners attending the college travel from Redbridge, Haringey, Hackney and other areas. This monitoring visit follows a monitoring visit and re-inspection of the hospitality curriculum area in 2008. At the re-inspection, hospitality was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

What further success has the college achieved in the improvement of success rates for learners on long courses?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving success rates since the previous monitoring visit. Success rates for all courses improved between 2006/07 and 2007/08 by three percentage points to 82% and the majority of long courses were above national averages. The success rate for adult learners at level 1 in 2007/08 was 86%, significantly above the national average for similar colleges. Success rates for 16–18 learners on long courses at level 3 were broadly in line with the national average.

Achievement rates on most long courses were around or slightly above national averages. Achievement rates for adults at level 1 were significantly higher than national averages at 92%. The college has recognised that courses in some curriculum areas were not successful and has identified alternative provision in business studies, ICT and engineering. However it is too early to measure the impact of these changes on success rates. Learners from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as white learners, with the exception of black Caribbean learners who achieve less well, but still above national average figures. The college has ensured that the performance of different groups of learners is a key focus for curriculum reviews.

How well has the college improved key skills portfolio management and success rates?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress to improve the provision of key skills since the last monitoring visit. College data shows that overall success rates have improved from 29% in 2006/07 to 53% in 2007/08. Success rates for adult learners on franchise programmes at level 1 remain high at 75%. The success rates at levels 2 and 3 have increased significantly to 58% and 67% respectively. The college has focused well on key skills and predicts that success rates for 2008/09 will improve still further.

The integration of key skills into curriculum areas has been improved since the previous inspection and there has been a concerted effort to improve performance on key skills tests. Tutorials focus more effectively on key skills and good support and staff training is provided by a central key skills team. Thorough systems are in place to verify and moderate portfolios.

What further success has the college achieved in the improvement of learners' attendance and punctuality?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving learners' attendance and punctuality. Overall attendance remained at 82% for 2007/08 and is currently the same for 2008/09. The college has learners with a wide range of barriers to education and many have been disadvantaged at school, particularly those aged 14–16. For some of these learners, attending classes five days in a row is an achievement. The college continues to focus strongly on improvements through the curriculum review process and has put appropriate procedures in place to ensure learners attend and are more punctual. Teachers, tutors and administrators follow up absences promptly by telephone or text messaging.

Managers and staff at all levels continue to monitor learners' progress in attendance and punctuality. Tutorials are used effectively to support learners and set individual targets for improvement. Some processes have not worked effectively, for example, the 'ten minute rule', where learners at risk of not arriving within ten minutes of the start of the lesson often fail to attend. The college is currently reviewing its processes following feedback from learners.

A recently introduced electronic attendance monitoring system has been extended across the college and learners are able to access their own attendance record. It is hoped that, with the full implementation of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), parents will also be able to access this information. The college has introduced clear targets for learners' attendance at course level, and some curriculum areas have successfully introduced rewards to reinforce good attendance.

Quality of provision

What further progress has been made by the college in improving the hospitality provision?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to further improve the quality of hospitality provision. At the reinspection in July 2008, hospitality was judged to be satisfactory. Long course success rates for 2007/08 are well above the national average, although from 2006/07 and 2007/08 the overall success rate has remained the same at 79%. Success rates for most students have improved between 2006/07 and 2007/08, in particular at level 2. However, for students aged 16–18 on level 1 long courses, success rates overall have declined and for students on level 3 long courses, success rates have remained constant. Retention rates in 2008/09 for students aged 16–18 are 91% and for adult students, 85%.

At the previous reinspection, teaching and learning were judged to be satisfactory. The latest data from the college's internal observation process on teaching and learning, reports that all teaching and learning is now good or better. Joint observations are used to quality assure teaching and learning and the department has recently introduced a pilot programme of observation of teaching by students.

The self-assessment report for 2007/08 grades the provision as good. A key strength is stated as the 'increased success rates above national benchmark'. However, overall long course success rates have not improved from 2006/07. This is not reflected in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

What success has the college had in improving the management of course performance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the management of course performance. Since the previous inspection the college has revised and improved the course performance review process. Greater focus is given to quality improvement. Curriculum managers monitor course progress through regular course team meetings and reviews are conducted termly with senior management. Revisions to course and departmental targets are based upon accurate data and individual student performance. Access to and reliability of data has been much improved. Data is well monitored. Curriculum managers are now more accountable for the performance of their department. They set success rate targets and subject sector grades which are closely reviewed with senior management.

The process of monitoring teaching and learning has improved. In 2008/09, quality assurance of internal teaching and learning observations has been by joint observations of staff by curriculum managers and teaching and learning 'advanced practitioners'. Key aspects of observations are recorded and effectively monitored by departments, highlighting areas of strength and improvement collectively and for

individual staff. This analysis supports the planning of support for individual staff and cross college staff development.

College data indicates that the teaching and learning profile has much improved. In 2007/08, 70% of teaching and learning was graded good or better, 29% satisfactory and 1% graded inadequate, compared to 52%, 45% and 4% respectively in 2006/07.