

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Knowsley Community College

Date of visit: 9 January 2009

Context

Knowsley Community College is a general further education college that was formed in April 1990 from the amalgamation of Kirkby College of Further Education, Knowsley Central Tertiary College and the sixth forms of Kirkby schools. The college operates from two major centres in Roby and Kirkby and a specialist centre for training in land-based industries. Education and training ranges from entry level programmes to higher education. Most learners, aged 16 to 18 and 19+, are on entry level and level 1 courses, but significant numbers are also on level 2 and 3 courses.

Census information shows that Knowsley is one of the most deprived areas in the country with just over 50% of the population living in the 10% most deprived areas in England and Wales. The level of skills and qualifications in the area is below the national average. The achievement of school leavers is below the national average for achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE and, when mathematics and English are included, the local figure is 26.7% compared with a national figure of 46% for 2007. This places Knowsley at the bottom of national performance tables for this measure.

The most recent inspection of Knowsley Community College was in February 2008. The college was graded as good for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management. Equality of opportunity was outstanding while achievement and standards were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

College overall success rates declined during 2006/07 and were identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. What progress has the college made to improve success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 had improved slightly at level 2, remained static at level 1 and declined at level 3. Since inspection, the level 2 success rates have maintained a gradual improvement, while those at level 3 declined further and at level 1 declined significantly. Success rates for

learners aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 3 are now well below national averages for colleges of a similar type.

In 2006/07 success rates for adult learners increased at level 3 but showed a marked decline at levels 1 and 2. The improving trend at level 3 has been maintained with success rates now 7% above the national average. Success at level 2 remains static and some 11% below the 2006/07 national average. Level 1 success rates have further declined and are now significantly below the national average.

In 2006/07 the overall success rates for long programmes in all but two sector subject areas were below their equivalent occupational national average, some significantly below. This improved in 2007/08 with success rates in five sector subject areas now above national averages.

Since inspection the college has implemented a number of initiatives to improve retention, achievement and success rates. The college has increased the number of operational managers with responsibility for monitoring and supporting course quality and performance. In general education comparative in-year retention has improved from 90% for 2007/08 to 95% in January 2009. Many curriculum areas have reviewed and changed their curriculum offer, with rigorous attention paid to entry requirements and the guidance and information learners receive during recruitment. Some curriculum areas have increased tutorial time, reduced group sizes and promoted a greater emphasis on additional support for assignment work together with a greater focus on supported virtual learning.

The college has removed many underperforming courses and managers closely monitor those remaining. The college has invested in electronic systems to monitor learners' performance. The new electronic learner monitoring system is linked to attendance monitoring systems and identifies achievement targets for all aspects of the learner's course. Learners at risk of not achieving their attainment targets are colour coded for the level of risk, with reports sent automatically to tutors and curriculum section managers for actions to be identified and implemented. However, the system does not record if learners are achieving in line with their attainment potential.

What progress has the college made in improving key skills success rates?	Insufficient progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, key skills success rates had declined significantly over the three years prior to 2006/07 and were very low for both learners aged 16 to 18 and adults, particularly for numeracy. Key skills success rates improved by only two percentage points in 2007/08. The college has completed a comprehensive evaluation of key skills provision and taken further action to bring about improvement. The college has raised the profile of key skills through improved

and dedicated accommodation and changes to timetables including increased time for application of numbers, and combining communication and information technology as one session. Curriculum section managers are now responsible for key skills performance within their areas helped by two newly recruited key skills monitoring and quality managers.

A new key skills database ensures that learners are enrolled only when it is appropriate to do so. The system monitors learners' attendance and progress and is being integrated with college systems for monitoring and reviewing learners' progress. Greater emphasis is given to learners' progress and achievement in key skills. Key skills tutors now provide information which is discussed with learners at their reviews. Staff development includes the opportunity for occupational staff involvement in key skills sessions and prepares staff for the introduction of functional skills within the college.

What progress has the college made in continuing to improve work-based learning success rates?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, overall success rates for work-based learners were satisfactory. In 2007/08, overall and timely success rates for both advanced apprentices and apprentices aged 16 to 18 and 19+ continued to improve. They show a three-year trend of improvement and are now at or above the national average for all occupations. Timely success rates also increased for both age groups in 2007/08. However whilst the advanced apprentices aged 19+ showed the most significant increase at 30 percentage points, both advanced apprentices and apprentices aged 19+ remained below national averages.

Work-based learning provision is fully integrated into curriculum areas. The introduction of further cross-college roles has focused on ensuring greater consistency of experience and sharing of good practice. Cross-college staff development activities effectively increase staff awareness of the strategic importance of work-based learning and their understanding of its management structures and requirements.

A centralised tracking system provides timely and appropriate information. This is used at monthly performance meetings on the performance of individual learners and enables appropriate measures to be implemented to support learners.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in further improving teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and learning was judged to be good. The college's observation of teaching and learning grades for 2007/08 show that it has maintained its grade profile with over three quarters of lessons judged to be good or outstanding.

The observation of teaching and learning scheme has been refined to place greater emphasis on reducing the number of sessions judged as satisfactory. Timely and appropriate support and development is provided for tutors whose lessons have been graded as satisfactory, with opportunities for further observations to validate improvements.

Observation of teaching and learning records have been thoroughly analysed to identify common themes in sessions judged to be less than good. An appropriate range of college-wide staff development activities have been developed and are offered to address these. A wide range of approaches provide staff with good access to resources for further improving their teaching and learning sessions. Good opportunities exist for the cross-college sharing of good practice.

What progress has the college made in developing the enrichment programme?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection the college has completed a comprehensive evaluation of the enrichment offer by department, whole college and through the tutorial entitlement. Learners' views formed a major contribution. A range of additional activities, including sporting activities aimed specifically at women, have been introduced. Learners are much more aware of the college offer through well informed information, advice and guidance staff, tutors and pastoral staff. The college promotes the enrichment programme effectively through intranet advertising, posters and information in learners' personal planners.

The enrichment coordinator monitors the success of the enrichment programme by analysing the relevance of topics and learners' requests, attendance and, where appropriate, their achievements. Learners value the additionality the college provides and the college's responsiveness to their requests for new activities.

Since inspection the learner uptake of enrichment activities has more than doubled. Through enrichment activities one learner has won a place on the 'prime minister's global fellowship' as part of a community initiative.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in using targets to contribute to continuous improvement?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, retention and pass rate targets were in place at course level but were not reconciled with the college target. The college has developed and introduced a process at section level to enable targets to be reconciled. The process has been further strengthened through the development and implementation of an intranet-based tool for course leaders to set performance targets, and complete course reviews, self-assessment and action planning. The new system automatically grades provision according to internal success rates judged against national averages. Extensive staff development to introduce the new system and raise staff awareness of occupational national success rates has taken place. The college has set a number of cross-college performance targets. However, some course level targets lack challenge.

Curriculum section managers meet monthly with course team leaders to monitor retention and identify learners who are at risk of underachieving or leaving their programme. A planned increase in the numbers of curriculum section managers in early 2009 is intended to increase the focus on the monitoring of individual learner progress, identifying at-risk learners, and action planning for improvement.

The college has invested in the development and implementation of a learner electronic achievement profiler to monitor the progress of learners, set learner targets, and produce progress reviews. Extensive staff development has prepared staff for its use. It is too early yet to judge the impact of the new system.

Self-assessment at curriculum and college level insufficiently evaluates curriculum performance of retention, achievement and success against internal performance targets, national averages or historical trend. However, the quality improvement plan details all courses below the Learning and Skills Council minimum levels of performance with very appropriate actions and targets for improvement.