

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: City College, Coventry

Date of visit: 2 June 2009

Context

City College Coventry (the college) was last inspected in May 2007. Effectiveness of provision, achievement and standards and leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. Capacity to improve and equality of opportunity were judged to be good. Five sector subject areas were judged to be satisfactory and one was judged to be good. The college received a notice to improve from the Learning and Skills Council in 2008, which has recently been lifted.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving success rates for 16 to 18 year old learners on level 3 programmes, particularly on AS/A2 programmes?	Insufficient progress
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The college has managed to improve overall long success rates substantially, at whole college level for all ages, and for 16 to 18 year old learners at all levels, to be in line with and slightly below averages respectively. However, whilst level 3 success rates for 16 to 18 year old learners have also improved, they remain significantly below the sector average.

Retention rates for 16 to 18 year old learners on level 3 programmes have been improving faster than the national rate, but remain below the national average. In-year retention for 2008/09 shows the trend of improvement continuing. Pass rates have risen steadily in the past three years and are slightly below the national average. Success rates at AS level in 2007/08 were the same as 2006/07 and remain significantly below the average. The proportion of learners achieving high grades for AS levels increased but remains well below the sector average. GCE A level success rates increased significantly in 2007/08, but remain below the average. High grades for GCE A2/A levels only improved marginally and remain significantly below the average.

All the key value-added indicators suggest that 16 to 18 year old learners on level 3 programmes achieve in line with expectations based on their prior attainment.

What progress has been made in improving success rates on access to higher education programmes?	Reasonable progress
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Overall success rates for all access to higher education programmes including part-time have been low for the past 3 years. The college has simplified and rationalised the access to higher education provision, with fewer entry points, clearer options and a greater focus on retention. Poorly performing aspects of the provision, such as the science options and some of the part-time options have been dropped. Success rates for the full-time access to higher education provision have increased over the past two years and for 2007/08 were in line with the national average. This trend of improvement has continued in the current year.

What progress has been made on improving success rates in business studies programmes?	Insufficient progress
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Low success rates in business, administration and law programmes contributed significantly to the college's notice to improve. Success rates for this sector subject area declined between 2006/07 from 62% to 58% and are very significantly below the sector average. The self-assessment report graded the area as inadequate and the college put the area in 'special measures'. The college identified six specific courses, in addition to GCE A and AS levels, which contributed to the low success rates. These courses have been monitored closely and in-year data suggest that despite increasing success rates on these specific programmes, the overall success rate for the sector subject area will remain below sector average.

What progress has been made in addressing the low key skills' success rates?	No discernable progress
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In 2007/08, the key skills' success rate for 16 to 18 year old learners at level 1 increased substantially but remained significantly below average. At level 2, the success rate only increased marginally and is very significantly below average. At level 3, the success rate increased substantially but remains significantly below average. Adult key skills' success rates have improved slightly at all levels but remain very substantially below national averages.

Key skills' success rates broken down by curriculum areas show far too much variability in results, with success rates ranging from 19% to 76% and two out of seven areas showing a decline.

The management of, and responsibility for, key skills in curriculum areas is too variable. The quality of key skills teaching within curriculum areas is weak and curriculum action plans make little reference to key skills. The overall effectiveness action plan for key skills and the more detailed key skills action plan are not sufficiently specific or measurable and inconsistently implemented within curriculum areas.

In the past year the college has centralised crucial aspects of key skills' management and delivery such as learner identification, tracking, materials development and assessment and has introduced online testing across the college, which shows signs of improving in year pass rates. However, it is too early to gauge the full impact of these measures.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving teaching and learning?	Reasonable progress
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In the last year the college has continued to develop its teaching and learning arrangements. It has increased the proportion of full- and part-time teachers observed in the current year. Most teachers have both a graded and developmental observation. The pool of observers has been increased substantially to support these developments.

The college's new appraisal scheme is well informed by the outcomes of lesson observations. The outcomes of observations are used to ensure that inadequate and satisfactory teaching grades lead to individual action plans and coaching or support from advanced practitioners. Teachers with less than good grades are reobserved. Some 70% of teachers who have been reobserved have improved their observation grade by at least one grade. The increase in the number of observations provides the college with an informative database. The college analyses and reports on key strengths and weaknesses, which informs staff development and the activity of advanced practitioners. However, the self-assessment report has examples of discrepancies between the overall grade for teaching and learning and learner outcomes and the college has yet to use lesson observation data to fully explore the correlation between the quality of teaching and learning and success rates. The observation system does not yet gather sufficient information for the college to judge the quality of tutorials.

What progress has been made in improving the tutorial provision for full-time learners?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress in improving tutorial provision, which was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The coordination of tutorials has improved with both enrichment and *Every Child Matters* themes better linked into the tutorial programme. The quality of tutorials still varies between curriculum areas. Some schools have developed very good practice. For instance, in the school of performing and creative arts tutorials encompass good reviews of progress, where issues are identified in a timely manner with good action planning to promote progress made and other benefits for learners. In most tutorials, academic staff and additional learning support staff work closely with each other and communicate well to provide good support for the range of learners' needs. In the fewer weak tutorials students do not

have sufficient formal reviews of progress in order to meet their individual needs and identified actions are not sufficiently recorded or monitored.

What progress is the college making in improving target setting for learners?	Insufficient progress
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The college has made insufficient progress in improving target setting. This was an area for improvement at the previous inspection and the college acknowledges this remains an improvement aspect. The college has held training for staff in the past 12 months, but it has not led to an improvement in target setting across all curriculum areas. The college has identified this and further targeted training is planned. Whilst there are some examples of good target setting, much remains poor. Too often targets are little more than a list of actions to 'do better' and are not based on being specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound. Teachers do not identify sufficiently how learners can improve on their grade predictions and do not sufficiently stretch or challenge learners.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to ensure that quality improvements are consistent and sustainable?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress in ensuring that quality improvements are consistent and sustainable. In the last 12 months, the college has introduced a new quality framework. This framework has two key components. On alternate years each curriculum area will have a 'mini inspection' or classroom observation and learner talkback. Suitably qualified external consultants conduct mini inspections in conjunction with college staff, in order for staff to have a better understanding as to how to rigorously evaluate provision. The mini inspections are successful in accurately identifying the strengths and areas for improvement. The classroom observation and learner talkback conducted by college staff with good or better teaching grades, is a rigorous observation of the quality of teaching and learning which takes good account of students' views and provides an accurate assessment of the quality of provision. The senior management team have also introduced weekly key performance indicator meetings. The agenda for these meetings is pre-determined according to the time of year and performance indicator. The purpose is to ensure that areas of under-performance are monitored frequently at a senior management level.

What actions have been taken to improve the rigour of self assessment at course level?	Reasonable progress
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The college is making reasonable progress and has taken some good actions to improve the rigour of self-assessment at course level. Considerable staff training has been undertaken in the last 12 months to raise awareness of the self-assessment process.

The college is also developing and piloting an electronic course review system which will enable course leaders to be better informed when undertaking analysis of key performance data. There are examples of good course reviews and self-assessment, for instance in science where the resulting development plan clearly identifies what actions need to be taken in order to improve identified aspects. However, although all course self-assessment reports are scrutinised by the management team, a few of them do not clearly identify all areas of concern.