

# Epping Forest College

Reinspection Monitoring Visit

---

Unique reference number: 130677

Name of lead inspector: Melanie Kavanagh HMI

Last day of inspection: 4 November 2009

Type of provider: General Further Education college

Address: Borders Lane  
Loughton  
Essex  
IG10 3SA

Telephone number: 0208 5088311

## REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Epping Forest College is a medium sized general further education college in West Essex. It is located close to the towns of Debden and Loughton but also recruits from economically and socially deprived East London boroughs including Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Newham, Redbridge, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets. The college's mission is 'to be the college of first choice for learners, employers and the community'. The pattern of recruitment means that the college is ethnically diverse. Almost half the students aged 16 to 18 and approximately 15% of learners aged 19+, live in areas of high economic disadvantage. In September 2008, the college moved into its new campus built alongside the old facilities.

Unemployment rates in the Epping Forest District are lower than average at 3.8% but are higher in the East London Boroughs, particularly for people of minority ethnic heritage. The local authority average for five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics is lower than average at 46%.

The college offers courses in 14 of the 15 sector subject areas. The college also provides courses for more than 100 students aged 14 to 16. The college has recently reviewed its curriculum and reduced its offer at AS level from 28 subjects to 18. Consequently, there has been growth in vocational areas including secretarial, construction, motor vehicle and arts and media. A small apprenticeship provision is offered through the Apex consortium. The college secured a Train to Gain contract in 2008/09 but its potential funding was reduced due to national constraints in 2009/10.

The college was last inspected in December 2008. The overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, achievement and standards, leadership and management and the promotion of equality of opportunity were all inadequate. The achievement and standards for adult learners received a contributory grade of satisfactory. Quality of provision was satisfactory. Arts, media and publishing were good; engineering and manufacturing and technologies; languages, literacy and culture and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages were satisfactory. Science and mathematics and business, law and administration were inadequate.

The college has experienced a period of instability at senior management level with three principals in a relatively short period. At present, the college has an interim acting principal with plans for a permanent principal appointment for the summer of 2010. The long-standing chair of corporation has recently resigned and a new chair appointed.

## Themes

### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Epping Forest College made in establishing accurate self-assessment and consistent quality improvement across the curriculum? Reasonable progress

The last inspection report noted the improvement to the self-assessment report (SAR) in 2007/08 as compared to the less accurate SAR of the previous year. The revision and updating of 2008/09 has included new course review procedures linked to quality improvement plans. The early draft SAR is well supported by evidence and data in many areas; however, some sections remain overly descriptive. Judgments in the early draft SAR are broadly consistent with the evidence presented but may be subject to further change before the formal presentation to the corporation.

The college recognises that further improvements are required to departmental SARs. Examples of early departmental SARs include those requiring further refinements to achieve accurate and evaluative documents upon which to build the overall college SAR.

Realistic targets for improvement have been set and generally met in 2008/09. The approach to quality improvement is increasingly more consistent across the curriculum and well supported by monthly management meetings and reviews of progress against targets.

### Outcomes for learners

What progress has Epping Forest College made in improving outcomes, particularly for students aged 16 to 18? Reasonable progress

Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 was a key area for improvement at the last inspection. Early college data show overall long course success rates increased from 71% in 2007/08 to 76% in 2008/09. The greatest gains have been in retention, which rose from 81% to 89%. In contrast, achievement rates declined slightly from 87% to 85%.

The last inspection judged long course success rates for students aged 16 to 18 to be a key area for improvement. College data show improvements for this age group at all three levels. Level 1 success rates remain below average but have risen by eight percentage points to 73%. At level 2, success rates have increased to 79% compared to the 2007/08 average of 74%. Level 3 success rates have increased to a broadly average 75%.

Inspectors identified high success rates for adults as a significant strength of the college at the last inspection. Although there has been some slight decline, overall they remain broadly average compared to 2007/08 averages for similar colleges.

Success rates for AS levels have increased to broadly the 2007/08 average and for GCE A levels have risen to 92%. High-grade achievement remains well below average. Key Skills success rates have risen from a low base to 57%.

Most students responding to a questionnaire and interviewed at this visit said they enjoyed their lessons but many found the double lesson periods too long.

### Quality of provision

What progress has Epping Forest College made in establishing productive employer engagement?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

The last inspection judged that employer engagement was a key area for improvement. The college has worked hard to establish improved links with employers and to expand its full cost courses. Work placements in business have expanded and improved and the database of employers has increased. Despite these improvements, the college has been unable as yet to establish fully productive employer engagement. The small Train to Gain contract is unlikely to expand due to national constraints and the apprenticeship programme provided through the APEX consortium remains very small. The college is well aware of the further improvements needed and has produced a detailed employer engagement strategy to support their plans.

### Quality of provision

What progress has Epping Forest College made in establishing an accurate view of the quality of teaching and using this to secure improvements?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Since the last inspection, the college has made many changes to improve the monitoring of teaching and learning. The application of the lesson observation system is now more systematic and the criteria for grading are clearer. The college identifies good or better teaching and learning practice so that it can be shared with a wider audience. A single development day has been a college-wide focus for this sharing, and further events are planned. In addition, curriculum areas have a greater focus on the improvement of teaching and learning and this is reflected in the content of team meetings and self-assessments. Increasingly, overall college development needs are being identified accurately and addressed through professional development. Training for the observation of lessons and its moderation is becoming increasingly widespread and effective

Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's own evaluation of teaching and learning, and that improvement is evident since the last inspection. In particular, the college has made determined efforts to support teachers whose lessons were judged inadequate, and has had marked success in moving these to satisfactory or good. Inspectors agreed with the college that it now needs to improve the effectiveness

with which classes cater for the most and least able. The current focus on teaching rather than learning in lesson observations is hindering this move.

What progress has Epping Forest College made to ensure that learners have individual learning plans that support their progress and provide useful targets for improvement? Reasonable progress

The last inspection identified the need to improve the poor target setting on students' individual learning plans. The college recognises the need to ensure consistent use of individualised learning plans to improve standards. Since the last inspection, much training has taken place to ensure that the use of targets is consistent across the college, and that the process builds in an element of aspiration. Systems have been introduced to ensure that students have a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve, and to improve communications between subject and pastoral tutors to the benefit of students. The college has substantive plans to implement a much improved electronic progress monitoring system that will allow much better access for tutors and students.

#### Leadership and management

How far has Epping Forest College established an appropriate and well-supported strategic direction? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the lack of clarity in the college's strategic direction was a key weakness. A new and recent strategic plan contains simple, clear objectives and targets. The strategic plan contains an appropriate emphasis on the learner and the quality of teaching and learning through its five strategic aims. The corporation has been involved with the production of the plan and it is well supported by the managers and staff interviewed at the time of the visit. Briefings and communications from senior managers reinforce the role of strategic aims and how they support improvement strategies.

At present, learners do not always feel that their views and concerns are addressed adequately and acted upon. The college has recognised this and has very recently appointed a learner engagement manager to establish better communication as a matter of urgency.

The interim principal has established a revised management structure linked clearly to key areas of the college. Changes within the college have resulted in some loss of teaching and support staff posts; however, most staff interviewed at the time of the visit were supportive of the changes and of senior leaders and managers.

What progress has been made in governors' oversight and monitoring of the performance of Epping Forest College? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, inspectors found that governors had been insufficiently rigorous in monitoring the performance of learners and slow to challenge managers

about weaknesses in provision. They also judged that the quality of information they received to be poor but improving.

Governors have undertaken a review of their operation and impact. The committee structure has been revised and governors been involved in the formation of the new strategic plan. Following the resignation of the long serving chair of corporation, governors have very recently appointed a new chair. The monitoring committee has received clear and detailed information on students' performance for their most recent meetings.

What progress has Epping Forest College made in promoting equality and diversity? Reasonable progress

Outcomes for Black Caribbean and Black African learners have improved since the last inspection and are now at the college average. Male and female students have had comparable success rates for the past two years in the college overall. Learners in receipt of additional support achieve as well, or better, than their peers.

College data are analysed thoroughly and actions are taken to address areas of underachievement including that of some learners of minority ethnic backgrounds on level 1 programmes. Actions have included the provision of additional learning support and continuing targeted pastoral support. The college displays prominently a range of high quality materials which celebrate diversity and encourage high aspirations for all learners.

The recently appointed equality and diversity manager is implementing an appropriate equality and diversity plan. This includes; formation of a broader equality and diversity forum comprising staff from across the college; significant training for staff and managers; identification of an equality and diversity link governor and devising and commencing a programme of impact assessments. Curriculum consistency in equality and diversity is being addressed through a range of measures including staff training, consultation on the single equality scheme and the development of learning and teaching standards; however, this work is at an early stage. The college has been slow in implementing the single equality scheme.

#### Science and mathematics

What progress has Epping Forest College made to secure improvements to the provision in science and mathematics? Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress to improve provision in mathematics and science. The college's own data for 2008/09 indicate that success rates for long courses increased, in the case of students aged 19 and over to above the previous year's national average. For those aged 16 to 18, improvements did not reach the national average. For key skills, success rates increased markedly over the low levels of 2008 though they remain below the national figure. Overall improvements mask

considerable variations between GCE subjects. The proportion of high grades attained is low. GCSE results have improved and the proportion of students attaining high grades in mathematics is now close to the national average. As at the last inspection, male students do not attain standards that are as high as females, although this latter group showed marked improvements in 2009.

The criteria for admission onto science and mathematics courses are now applied with better consistency. Consequently, in-year retention has improved with fewer students leaving courses. Early indications are that these improvements occur in both GCE A level and AS level courses. Students are now making better progress in class than at the last inspection because teaching and learning have improved.

Analysis of data and target setting has improved. Course reviews are now good, and have an appropriate emphasis on teaching and learning. Self-assessments are sufficiently self critical and management systems are being introduced quickly to ensure consistency between subjects. Overall, the college has a good understanding of the improvements necessary in science and mathematics and has made satisfactory progress in implementing them.

#### Business, law and administration

What progress has Epping Forest College made to secure improvements to the provision in science and mathematics?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Long course success rates for learners have increased from 62% in 2007/08 to 79% in 2008/09, and are now above national average. Most qualifications have success rates at or around the national average. While the success rate in and GCE A level and AS level law and accounting is above the national average, a very high proportion of learners leave within the first few weeks of the programme. The success rate on AS level business is low.

Since the last inspection, two section leaders have been appointed to manage day-to-day aspects of most of the area. Retention and achievement has improved. Regular monitoring of underperforming courses now takes place. Entry requirements have been reviewed and are now applied with greater consistency. Pastoral support has been improved and more closely targeted to those at risk of non-completion. There has been significant staff development in learning and teaching including differentiation, however the impact of this is yet to be assessed through the lesson observation process. Quality assurance processes are identifying effectively staff needing support.

Since the last inspection, the range of courses has increased through the development of a new progression award for foundation level learners including a business stream. Additional subjects have been built into some programmes for full-time learners. The section is planning to offer business programmes to learners aged

14 to 16 in conjunction with local schools. A limited range of business courses is available to learners in employment.

Since the last inspection, more business learners undertake work experience as part of their programme. Employers are involved in some aspects of course delivery, for example as visiting speakers, however this is not yet quantified by the college and is not an entitlement for learners.



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2009