

Lambeth College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Lambeth College is a large general further education college located in the London Borough of Lambeth. In 2008/09, 2,297 students aged 14 to 18 and 11,784 adults attended the college. Of these 31% were full-time and 69% were part-time. Some 67% of students are from Black and minority ethnic communities. This is significantly higher than the proportion of these groups in the local population, which was 38% at the last census.

The college offers a wide range of provision covering almost all sector subject areas and the college has Centres of Vocational Excellence in construction, business, and health and social care. In 2009 the unemployment rate in Lambeth was 9.6% compared with 6.9% nationally.

The previous inspection was carried out in 2008. The college's overall effectiveness was judged to be good, as were its capacity to improve, leadership and management, and quality of provision. Achievement and standards were satisfactory and equality of opportunity was outstanding. This report focuses on key areas for improvement recorded at the last inspection and other aspects of provision identified through pre-inspection analysis.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates for Reasonable students, particularly on long courses? progress

Success rates for students on long courses increased by six percentage points in 2008/09 to around the national average. Rates for students aged 16 to 18 following long courses at levels 1 and 2 increased by 13 and 9 percentage points respectively. The increases in rates for adults at these levels were not as great. There was a slight drop in success rates at level 3 for both age groups, and too few students make the progress expected of them, based on their prior attainment. Although success rates for most short courses increased, they remain below national averages. College data indicate that the actions it is taking to raise success rates, including more effective initial guidance and support, are having a positive impact. While the college continued to improve retention rates at a steady pace, it also reversed the decline in overall pass rates, particularly for students aged 16 to 18.

Overall and timely success rates for learners on Train to Gain programmes at level 2, who form almost two thirds of the Train to Gain cohort, each improved by about eight percentage points and are well above national averages. However, those at level 3 declined to below average.

How much progress has been made in improving attendance and punctuality of students? Insufficient progress

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has enabled managers to focus more on monitoring and improving students' attendance and academic progress. Management information provided to course teams is more accurate and timely. Course teams and tutors communicate better, allowing earlier intervention by tutors with students who are absent without sufficient reason. Course managers provide regular progress reports that allow senior managers to monitor and review course performance and the actions taken to improve more effectively. The college now presents awards to students who demonstrate high levels of attendance and progress.

Whilst these new procedures are having a positive effect in a few courses, they have yet to improve overall student attendance. Average attendance rates at the time of the visit showed an improvement of fewer than two percentage points compared with the same period in 2008/09 and are still low at around 80%. Punctuality rates have improved very little since the last inspection. The Student Performance Team provides effective support for learners who demonstrate persistent absence from lessons and are at risk of leaving their course. Retention rates continue to improve steadily, and show further in-year improvement in 2009/10.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support and enrich learning? Reasonable progress

Following a full staff skills audit, staff development has been increased to raise the confidence and understanding of teachers in using ILT to support and enhance learning. The thorough lesson observation scheme identifies teachers who rarely use ILT, or use it ineffectively. Targeted work by advanced teaching practitioners ensures that those teachers receive good support to improve their skills. Managers and teachers evaluate improvement through teachers' professional development reviews. The college has continued to improve students' access to interactive learning technologies particularly with the opening of the new, well-equipped, sixth form centre.

The college reports on the usage of the virtual learning environment (VLE) regularly. Since the last monitoring visit the numbers of courses, and students, using the system have increased around two fold. However, more than half the college courses still show little activity on the VLE by students. Students commonly say that they value the VLE as a way of catching up with missed work and to allow them to work at their own pace, and want more of this way of working. However, many also comment that the use of ILT by teachers is variable across courses.

What progress has been made to ensure that target setting for individual students is of a high standard and is regularly reviewed? Significant progress

Teachers and tutors have significantly improved target setting for students and the use of individual learning plans (ILPs) since the last inspection. Completion of ILPs is closely monitored by senior tutors, a new team set up in September 2009. Students value their ILPs and find the targets they have been set very helpful in planning their work and ensuring that they are making good progress. Targets for each student provide practical actions that are generally simple, clearly expressed and sufficiently detailed to enable their achievement to be evaluated.

Targets are closely related to the individual student, and there are some innovative uses of visual targets by tutors working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The information from ILPs forms the basis for reports to parents, carers or guardians of younger students. Students judged to be under performing in terms of achieving their targets can be referred to the Student Performance Team who provides a wide range of extra support including mentoring and coaching. Over the last two years around 75% of such students have been helped back on track and have completed their course.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the consistency and impact of quality assurance procedures and self-assessment, particularly at curriculum level? Significant progress

The improvements in quality assurance procedures have been well supported by the appointment of a new set of curriculum managers. Senior managers have charged them with bringing more consistency into self-assessment and review at curriculum level. The evidence from this visit shows that these changes are combining to produce a much more consistent approach across the college. Standardised course-review procedures generate quality improvement plans for each course. These are used to inform the self-assessment reports and development plans across the college.

Course reviews are now of a high standard. They focus well on students' views, improving their experiences and their progress. Students feel that their views are carefully listened to and that the college responds well to any problems they raise. Course teams produce quality improvement plans from these reviews that are generally very detailed and address the necessary areas for improvement. In a few curriculum areas, areas for improvement in the self-assessment report are too brief and lack detail. However, in the large majority of cases, targets and plans for quality improvement are clearly stated, practical and measurable.

What is the progress in improving communications with staff and students to improve the quality of provision? Significant progress

A staff survey early in 2009 revealed concerns among some staff about effective communications across the college and these are included in the college's self-assessment report. The college has responded well to these concerns. During the autumn of 2009 a series of staff workshops effectively identified practical actions that are now being set in train. These actions include: changes to staff accommodation; use of the principal's briefings across sites; strategies to help staff share teaching materials; changes in management structures to create smaller teams and base them close together; and, new approaches to curriculum projects directed by management boards.

The college consults students well. They feel closely involved in influencing the decisions taken by the college's managers and governors. Students elect representatives from each course who are trained well to fulfil their role. There are regular site and faculty meetings where student representatives raise issues that concern them and their colleagues. The college responds well and publicises effectively to the student community any changes made, via notice boards, the college website and the published minutes of the course representatives' meetings.

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