

Calderdale 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

Calderdale College is the sole provider of further education in Calderdale. It offers programmes in most subject areas. In 2008/09 the college enrolled 1,528 students aged 16 to 18 and 3,275 adults. The college offers courses to 350 apprentices, over 800 learners on Train to Gain programmes, 381 pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools and has a small and growing amount of higher education provision. The college is a major partner in local 14 to 19 provision through Campus Calderdale.

Calderdale College was inspected in November 2007 when its overall effectiveness was judged as satisfactory. It was judged to have a good capacity to improve and its quality of provision was also judged as good. Achievement and standards, and leadership and management, were judged to be satisfactory. At the last monitoring visit in January 2009 the college was judged to have made reasonable progress in three areas, including improvements to the quality assurance processes. It was judged to have made insufficient progress in raising success rates.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What improvements have there been in arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the last inspection? Reasonable
Progress

At the previous inspection and monitoring visit inspectors noted that the college had overstated some of the strengths in the self-assessment report. The current self-assessment process is robust and involves all staff at all levels. Effective use of accurate data underpins many of the judgements contained in the self-assessment report. However, in a few cases, strengths are still overstated and the 2008/09 report is overly descriptive in parts. Subject area self-assessment is detailed and provides an accurate assessment of the quality of provision, although in a few cases the evaluation of teaching and learning is insufficient. Links between self-assessment and quality improvement planning are clear within subject areas. Underperforming areas are given an internal 'notice to improve' and the detailed actions contained in the quality improvement plans are monitored stringently by senior managers. The college's overall quality improvement plan for 2009/10 is comprehensive and actions are monitored closely. However, success criteria or the expected impact of actions taken to improve provision are not always identified clearly.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates? Insufficient progress

At the last monitoring visit the college was judged to have made insufficient progress in raising success rates. Since then, the success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults have fallen and in 2008/09 were below the national averages for similar colleges. The success rate for students aged 16 to 18 declined against the national average and was nine percentage points below average in 2008/09. The rate for adults also fell in the same time period and was six percentage points below the national average for similar colleges.

Apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship success rates, including those completed within the planned time, are good in several areas such as childcare, hairdressing and plumbing. Success rates on Train to Gain dipped in 2008/09 to just under the national average for that year. Completion of Train to Gain programmes within the planned time also dipped in the same year but remained above average. Progression rates for learners on Entry to Employment programmes are good.

Students who receive additional learning support achieve very well. Key skills success rates, although improved in 2008/09, remain low. Recently introduced strategies for key skills delivery are beginning to show positive results but it is too soon to judge their full impact.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of the teaching and learning observation process? Insufficient progress

At the last monitoring visit, issues relating to the quality of the college's observations of teaching and learning remained and inspectors concluded that too little was said in the reports about students' learning or standards being attained. Insufficient good or better teaching in some programme areas is identified as an area for improvement in the college's 2008/09 self-assessment report. Rectifying this area for improvement is given a high priority by senior managers. A revised strategy for improving teaching and learning is in place that targets support, training and guidance to those teachers not yet achieving observation grades that are good or better. Advanced learning practitioners have been appointed recently to carry out this role and they work closely with a small caseload of teachers over a period of three to five months. The revised strategy focuses clearly on students' learning, although the college recognises that there is still more work to do to ensure that the written records of observations reflect this.

Informal feedback from teachers receiving support from the advanced learning practitioners is very positive; most report that they are benefiting already from the help they are receiving. This view is supported by the advanced learning practitioner team, course leaders and programme managers. Early evaluation of the monitoring records and the re-observations already completed indicate that the strategy is having a beneficial effect. However, it is too soon to evaluate the full impact on improving teaching and learning.

What progress has there been in improving the quality of key skills provision? Reasonable Progress

At the last inspection the inconsistent delivery of key skills was identified as an area for improvement. Success rates for key skills, although improved, were low in 2008/09. Recent developments to improve provision include changes to the key skills management team and increased use of key skills coordinators, assigned to curriculum areas, to ensure that key skills are integrated successfully into vocational courses. All learners are now assessed prior to enrolment to ensure that they are placed on courses at the appropriate level. Staff development and training in key skills is ongoing and all key skills teachers are expected to have or to work towards an appropriate key skills qualification. To raise standards further, models of good practice, demonstrated within the more successful subject areas, are shared widely across all college provision.

Data for the current year indicate that key skills success rates have improved and are currently 64% compared to 33% at a similar time last year. Attendance at key skills lessons has improved markedly and is now high.

What progress has the college made in its provision for school pupils aged 14 to 16 and other groups? Significant progress

At the last inspection, progression to full-time courses for school pupils aged 14 to 16 was judged to be good. Since then, the college's close partnership with secondary schools through Campus Calderdale has resulted in a broader curriculum and a more diverse range of pupils studying on college programmes. Vocational pathways, including young apprenticeships, are offered in construction, childcare, hairdressing, beauty therapy and sport. Diplomas are offered in creative and media and the built environment. Many of these courses are offered at the college's main site in Halifax. Good provision for school pupils is also made at the college's North Halifax Skills Centre which is highly effective in attracting more disengaged learners, including those not in education, employment or training, and adults. School pupils aged 14 to 16 achieve very well on college courses and their progression to further study at the college, at 91%, is outstanding.

Leadership and management

What progress has the restructured senior management team had on improving outcomes for students and rectifying areas of underperformance? Reasonable progress

In the last inspection leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. Since then the college has had three Principals, including an interim appointment in the period September 2007 to March 2008. The current Principal has been in post since summer 2008. More recently there have been significant changes in other senior management personnel. The indications are that the college is beginning to recover from this period of instability.

The Principal and his senior management team are unequivocal in their determination to raise expectations and improve success rates as a matter of urgency. Staff at all levels report that communication has improved markedly in the last year, that there is a changing culture based upon openness and that the level of accountability has increased greatly. Performance management is more rigorous and a good range of strategies to rectify underperformance and raise success rates has been implemented. A learner involvement team, set up to support students who are at high risk of not completing their course or programme, is proving very effective in retaining learners. Data relating to performance in the current year indicate marked improvements in attendance and retention, including in underperforming areas, compared to the same period last year. It is, however, too soon to judge the full impact of the college's work in raising success rates.

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