

South Thames College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130420

Name of lead inspector: Alex Falconer HMI

Last day of inspection: 04 March 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

Address: Wandsworth High Street
London
SW18 2PP

Telephone number: 02089 187777

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

South Thames College is a general further education college in south-west London, with centres in Wandsworth, Putney, Tooting and Roehampton. Provision ranges from pre-entry to degree-level courses and the majority of students are on programmes leading to vocational qualifications. In 2008/09 the college enrolled over 1,800 students aged 16 to 18, mainly on full-time courses, and around 7,700 adult learners, mostly on part-time courses. Around half the enrolments are at entry or foundation level. Provision at advanced level represents less than 15% of total enrolments. Literacy and numeracy and ESOL provision account for around 40% of the curriculum offer.

The college's curriculum includes a relatively small work-based provision. A school link programme and ESOL for overseas students are in place as well as trainees participating in Train to Gain programmes. The college is the main provider of Wandsworth Local Authority's adult and community learning. Most students live locally and around three quarters live in areas classified as socially disadvantaged. Just under half of all students identify themselves as White British, 15% as Black African and 12% as Black Caribbean. A major capital project has just been completed and the new building at the Wandsworth site is fully operational. The college has recently completed a merger with Merton College.

At the previous inspection in summer 2009 the college was judged to be good overall, with good capacity to improve. Leadership and management were also judged to be good, as were achievement and standards and the quality of provision. ESOL was judged outstanding and music and performing arts, literacy and numeracy, and business, administration and law were found to be good. Hairdressing and beauty therapy was judged to be satisfactory while health and social care was judged unsatisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What is the provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements? What progress has been made implementing the post-inspection action plan?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

Quality assurance is robust and is driving forward improvements successfully. The college self-assessment report is thorough and evaluative, and is rigorous in its judgments of quality. The post-inspection action plan and quality improvement plans are monitored thoroughly. Clear evidence trails indicate that review and monitoring are appropriate across levels of management. Performance indicators have been developed and are used well to track progress in, for example, verification outcomes, compliance with professional development and updating, and progress in setting quantitative targets for learners.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved and continues to be scrutinised with rigour. Staff morale is generally high and notably so in health and care and construction, where the pressure to improve is understandably high. Middle managers are enthusiastic and speak with confidence about recent improvements to learners' retention rates. They are thoroughly familiar with data and feel accountable yet supported in bringing about improvements to outcomes for learners. The college continues to foster and develop good relationships with local employers. National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes are successful in meeting local and cross-London training needs.

Considerable progress has been made in improving the provision in health and social care. Staffing has been reviewed thoroughly and new teaching staff are now in place. Support for improvements from senior managers has been thoughtful and appropriate.

Outcomes for learners

What are current success rates for learners? What progress has been made in increasing learners' successes?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

College data indicate that overall success rates for adult learners, which account for three quarters of all enrolments, are three percentage points above the national average for similar colleges. Adult learners' success rates on foundation courses, over half the enrolments, are significantly above national average. Overall success rates for all age groups were broadly at national average in 2008/09. However, a minority of long course success rates declined in 2009. Following analysis of the 2008/09 retention, achievement and success rates, managers across the college have been busy addressing identified weaknesses. Train to Gain timely success rates have improved, as have NVQ successes. Current Train to Gain data show continued improvement.

Retention rates have improved across the curriculum in the current year. Retention for 16 to 18-year-old students, identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, has improved markedly in the current year at all levels. In addition, recent value-added data show that learners make progress at or above the level predicted by their prior attainment on national diploma and national certificate programmes.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving health and care provision?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

Significant progress has been made in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Retention rates are monitored closely and have improved in comparison with the same period last year. New, well-qualified teaching staff have been recruited and the quality of teaching and learning has improved.

While concerns over attendance and punctuality remain, considerable effort has been made in tackling this problem. Teaching assistants and administrators work very closely with teachers to monitor and follow up lateness and absences.

Lesson planning is consistent and detailed, often with a good range of activities to hold students' interest and engage them in learning. Lessons are well paced and involve group, paired and individual work. Schemes of work reflect course requirements accurately and make clear the progression through topics. Learners demonstrate confidence in their subjects, ably linking theory to practice, contributing to debates and vocalising their opinions. Additional support for learners with literacy, numeracy or language needs is good and support staff work well with teachers to enable learners to make the most of their lessons. Well-designed assignments contribute successfully to the engagement and motivation of learners. Teachers are enthusiastic and positive about the support they receive from colleagues and the opportunities for professional development and collaborative work.

What progress has been made in target setting to monitor learners' progress? Reasonable progress

Learners speak confidently about the targets they set with their tutors and feel that they contribute to their progress. Successful training for staff in helping students set targets took place in summer 2009 for over 70 teachers from across the college curriculum. Targets in individual learning plans (ILPs) for full-time learners have improved markedly. Most ILPs now have clear targets and sensible evaluations of learners' progress. The best have quantitative targets, set by the learners themselves, complete with completion dates and sign off. All plans focus on improving attendance and punctuality, an important quality improvement strategy for the college. However, some ILPs have targets that are too general and reflect teachers' concerns rather than learners' views. They do not always comment on specific, course-related or skills-based progress. Quality audit procedures have identified these weaknesses and college managers are aware that this is work in progress.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in increasing the proportion of staff with teaching qualifications? Significant progress

The college 'Teaching Qualification and Professionalisation' policy has been reviewed and updated. This sets out clearly the legislative requirements regarding teaching qualifications together with professional development expectations, the Institute for Learning requirements and other relevant matters. Significant progress has been made in increasing the proportion of staff with teaching qualifications. Some 73% of the staff are already fully qualified and, of the remaining proportion, very nearly all

are part-qualified or in training. Only five teachers are currently not qualified or not in training.

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.

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
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010