

# Adult Education College Bexley

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 53104

**Name of lead inspector:** Tony Noonan HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 24 March 2011

**Type of provider:** Adult & Community Learning

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Bexley is an outer London unitary authority situated in South East London. It is a borough of sharp contrasts, with a mixture of relatively wealthy suburbs alongside some pockets of very high deprivation and social disadvantage.

Adult Education College Bexley delivered over 1,000 courses during 2009/10 to over 8,000 students, attracting more than 13,000 enrolments. It operates from three main centres and around 48 community venues, during the daytime and evenings, including weekends. The college employs around 143 staff undertaking management, administrative or support functions, with over 300 mainly part-time tutors delivering the teaching and training.

The previous inspection in April 2009 judged overall effectiveness of the college to be satisfactory, as were achievements and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management. The capacity to improve was good. Three subject areas were reported to be satisfactory: arts, media and publishing; literacy and numeracy; and, independent living and leisure skills. Languages, literature and culture, and family learning, were good.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which included the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

<b>What progress has been made in developing quality improvement procedures and the self-assessment process since the last inspection?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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The self-assessment process follows a clear schedule and involves a broad range of staff, stakeholders and partners, including local authority officers and local adult learning providers. The self-assessment report for 2009/10 details key strengths and areas for improvement accurately, although it does not highlight sufficiently the decrease in learners' outcomes for 2009/10.

Quality improvement procedures have made a positive impact on provision and have led to a number of improvements since the last inspection. These include improvements to buildings, facilities and equipment, particularly a £1.14 million extension at the Brampton Road site. Managers acknowledge that further improvements are required, such as better oversight and use of management information, for example learners' attendance rates. Additional staffing has been allocated for quality improvement work to further develop management information systems.

## Outcomes for learners

### What progress has been made in improving learners' outcomes since the previous inspection?

**Insufficient progress**

Just over half of the college's provision leads to accredited qualifications and the headline success rates for these courses decreased between 2008/09 and 2009/10. Overall success rates fell by 2.6% for long qualifications and are just below national averages. They decreased by almost 14 percentage points for short courses and are significantly below national figures. Success rates for adults on level 2 courses are above the national average, but marginally below for level 1 and level 3 programmes. They are low for the relatively small number of learners aged 16 to 18.

Success rates for learners taking non-accredited provision also fell significantly between 2008/09 and 2009/10, from 84% to 70% respectively. Success rates for subject areas are inconsistent. They are below national averages in preparation for life and work, which includes a large proportion of learners. However, current in-year retention rates show an improvement when compared to the equivalent period last year.

Learners greatly enjoy their time in the college, many feeling that it helps them to lead a fuller and more enriched life. Some learners also improve their job prospects and gain vital employability skills. Progression to further courses is good in some subject areas, but data are not collated centrally, so it is difficult to form an overall picture for progression across the college.

## Quality of provision

### What progress has been made in taking action to improve the quality of teaching and learning?

**Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection reported that the observation of lessons focused too much on teaching rather than learning and that improvement plans were not always formulated for teachers as a result of weaknesses identified through these lesson observations. Procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations continue to be reviewed and developed. Recent changes include all lesson observations taking place unannounced and within an annual review cycle. A team of coaches has been established recently to support tutors, such as those who receive no better than a satisfactory judgement. Subject specialists now observe in their own curriculum areas and their feedback is valued by tutors. The judgements of lesson observations are moderated rigorously. In the small number of joint lesson observations undertaken by inspectors and college staff, inspectors confirmed the college observers' findings. The form used to record judgements has been revised and now has a greater focus on learning. However, some records of observations still focus too much on what tutors do rather than the learning that is taking place. Use of information and learning technology (ILT) in the classroom is increasing and inspectors saw good examples where it was integrated well into lessons. The use of

the college's virtual learning environment is increasing, although not consistently by all staff yet.

**What progress has been made in taking action to improve initial assessment and target-setting processes?** **Insufficient progress**

The quality of initial assessment and target setting was highlighted as a key area for improvement at the last inspection and progress has been slow to improve this situation. Managers are still in the process of drafting an initial assessment policy and current practice remains inconsistent. Many learners receive an interview prior to joining their course which helps to assess their suitability and chances of success. Good practice is found in some subject areas, with assessments written from a vocational perspective. However, a significant minority of accredited courses do not assess the literacy and numeracy skills of learners, and informal assessment is carried out for learners taking non-accredited programmes. Very few learners are provided with additional learning support as a result of these assessments.

The completion and quality of individual learning plans are also too variable, as acknowledged by managers. Learning targets agreed with learners in some subject areas are specific and measurable, with very relevant comments to improve learners' standards. The progress of these learners is reviewed termly and targets are amended accordingly. However, for many courses the individual learning plan is either not completed, or is done in a perfunctory manner listing the overall course objectives without any personalised learning goals. Auditing of these learning plans is not carried out systematically by managers. Staff are briefed on procedures for completing individual learning plans, but insufficient detailed training has taken place. Links between initial assessments and individual learning plans are still not established consistently across all subject areas.

**What progress has been made since the previous inspection in taking action to develop and implement the Skills for Life strategy?** **Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection reported the lack of a clearly defined Skills for Life strategy. A comprehensive strategy and action plan are now in place. The college's Skills for Life group meets regularly and oversees the implementation of this strategy. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills in vocational subjects was piloted in a small number of areas, including hairdressing, where relevant tasks are now integrated in lessons and schemes of work for the benefit of learners. Managers acknowledge that this work needs to be extended to other subject areas and there are plans to do this in the next academic year. However, there is slippage in the action plan, for example sufficient Skills for Life champions to share good practice have yet to be identified and more staff training is required.

**What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in literacy and numeracy?**

**Significant progress**

At the last inspection, literacy and numeracy provision was judged to be satisfactory. Since then, a broad range of improvements has been secured. Outcomes for learners have improved consistently over a three-year-period and now exceed national averages. Initial assessment and target setting are carried out well. Learning targets agreed with learners are relevant and personalised, and are reviewed regularly. The use of ILT in the classroom as a tool to enhance learning has increased. Interactive whiteboards are used widely and positive feedback is received from learners on their use. The programme offer has been re-organised to include a greater number of shorter courses, and more weekend and twilight courses.

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