

# West Thames College

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130447

**Name of lead inspector:** Lynda Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:** London Road  
Isleworth  
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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

West Thames College was last inspected in November 2017. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

### Themes

**Theme 1 – How successful have leaders and managers been in improving the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications at level 2, attain high grades at level 3 and achieve their apprenticeships within the planned timescales?**

#### Reasonable progress

Governors and senior leaders have focused relentlessly on rectifying the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection report. Together, they have established a culture which encourages self-reflection and challenges staff at all levels to improve. They have set aspirational targets for themselves and for teachers and they monitor progress against these targets rigorously.

Senior leaders have put robust measures in place to ensure that middle managers and teachers monitor the progress of students closely. For example, they have introduced new reporting systems. As a result, senior leaders have identified swiftly the curriculum areas where achievement rates require improvement. They have put improvement plans in place, which are monitored frequently through performance reviews by the senior leadership team. Where students are at risk of not completing their qualifications, teachers intervene to help them to catch up with their work.

The most recent data shows that a slightly higher proportion of students on level 2 study programmes now achieve their qualifications. However, achievement remains slightly below that of similar providers, and leaders acknowledge that achievement needs to improve further.

Senior leaders and managers place a strong emphasis on ensuring that students make good progress in achieving their qualifications. Teachers have recently reviewed students' target grades and set students revised targets that challenge them to achieve high standards. In lessons, teachers make clear to students what they need to do to achieve high grades, and they set demanding tasks for students. Students know the targets that they have been set and are expected to achieve. As a result, a higher proportion of students on level 3 programmes achieve high grades than in previous years.

Senior leaders have restructured the management of apprenticeship provision and put a greater focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Managers now monitor the progress of apprentices frequently to ensure that they achieve their qualifications within the planned timescales. As a result, the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualification within the allocated time has increased over the previous three years. Leaders recognise that further improvements are still needed.

**Theme 2 – How successfully have leaders, managers and staff implemented strategies to improve learners’ attendance?**

**Reasonable progress**

Senior leaders have implemented new reporting systems to monitor attendance by curriculum area and by individual student. As a result, they now identify promptly curriculum areas with attendance that does not meet college expectations, and they take steps to deal with this. Managers are acutely aware of the need to improve attendance in their curriculum areas. They have implemented a number of projects to secure improvements, some as a result of a recent leadership and management programme. Managers have included the views of students within the project work. This has led, for example, to the introduction of report cards for students and reviews of timetables. In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations for students to arrive at lessons on time, ready to learn.

As a result of these interventions, students’ attendance has improved but still needs to be better. Recent data shows that students’ attendance has improved at all levels and in all curriculum areas from the previous year. Despite this, attendance in English and mathematics lessons remains below the attendance in vocational subjects and is too low. Leaders and managers are determined to improve attendance and have reflected this well in their self-assessment process. They have successfully applied for a strategic college improvement fund bid in partnership with another college to improve attendance further.

**Theme 3 – How well do teachers improve learners’ skills in English and mathematics?**

**Reasonable progress**

In comparison to previous years, a higher proportion of students aged 16 to 18 achieve their functional skills English qualifications at level 2. Students taking functional skills English and mathematics at entry level achieve their qualifications well.

The proportion of students attaining English GCSE grades 9 to 4 has improved over the previous three years and is now above the low national rate. In GCSE mathematics, the proportion of students attaining a grade 9 to 4 has continued to improve and is now above the low national rate.

Despite improvements in achievements in both English and mathematics, leaders and managers recognise areas where further improvements are required. For example, too few adult learners achieve their functional skills English qualifications at level 1 or

level 2, and the proportion of students aged 16 to 18 attaining GCSE mathematics at grade 9 to 4 is too low. Leaders and managers are taking appropriate actions to rectify the areas of weaker performance. As a result of a curriculum review, they have stopped teaching functional skills at level 2. From this academic year, students now take a GCSE in English or mathematics.

Senior leaders have recently revised the college's English and mathematics strategy and have taken positive steps to support learners to develop their English and mathematics skills and to achieve their qualifications. For example, they have increased teaching hours for functional skills and have held development days to support vocational teachers to develop students' English and mathematics skills within the vocational context. A new manager for English and mathematics, in post this academic year, carries out joint learning walks with vocational observers to support the development of learners' skills in these subjects.

As a result of actions taken by staff, students in vocational areas now speak confidently about the mathematics skills that they develop. For instance, students in engineering can explain how they calculate the weight of cars when designing the structure of bridges. Teachers correct spelling, punctuation and grammar well. Teachers in health and care lessons set aside time in lessons to develop learners' English skills, such as sentence structure, which learners are expected to use in their assignments.

**Theme 4 – How well do teachers set high expectations of learners and provide them with feedback so that they can improve the standard of their work?**

**Reasonable progress**

The standard of students' work is good. The large majority of teachers now set demanding assignments for students and have high expectations of them to achieve merit and distinction grades. Teachers provide students with detailed and helpful feedback in lessons and on written work, so that that they know what they need to do to improve. Students value and are motivated by the feedback that they receive and use this productively to improve the standard of their work. The majority of students are ambitious to progress onto further study or into employment and most do so.

Teachers provide demanding work in lessons so that students develop their skills and knowledge well. Teachers ensure that students provide in-depth responses to questions and tasks so that they develop higher-level thinking skills and can apply their knowledge to new situations.

In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not consistently have high enough expectations of students to complete work quickly and tasks are not sufficiently demanding. As a result, students' progress is not as strong as it could be.

**Theme 5 – How effective have leaders and managers been in ensuring that learners on 16 to 19 study programmes have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge in the workplace?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders, managers and staff have implemented a variety of relevant activities to develop students' work-related skills. They have recently introduced systems to monitor accurately the proportion of students who attend work-related activities. The vast majority of students attend relevant events, such as employer talks, project work and external events. For example, students on courses in make-up supported an exercise at Heathrow airport, when they did the make-up for actors playing victims in a disaster, and public service students shadowed the commanders at the airport who managed the mock-up situation. In dance, students performed at a local music festival.

The proportion of students who attended an external work placement increased in 2017/18, but is not yet high enough. The vast majority of students on vocational courses in engineering, business studies, media, construction and information technology attend external work experience placements. As a result, they develop their skills in time management, decision-making and working under pressure.

Leaders and managers acknowledge that in 2017/18 too few students in public services, science, travel and art and media had the opportunity to attend external work experience. They have clear plans in place to facilitate this in the second term of the current academic year. The majority of students have a good understanding of the benefits of work experience and know when this is planned within their timetables.

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