

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Carshalton College

Date of visit: 13 September 2007

Context

Carshalton College is a medium-sized general further education (FE) college in the London Borough of Sutton. The College operates on one site to the north of Carshalton in the centre of the borough. It is the only FE college in the borough, although there is a well-established adult education college. The College has undertaken substantial refurbishment work over the last few years with all buildings benefiting from modernisation. Capital projects since the previous inspection have resulted in the development of a care academy with nursery and additional teaching rooms, additional electrical installation and media facilities, staff and common room accommodation, IT classrooms and additional accommodation for staff rooms and beauty provision. Work should begin this year for the provision of a Sports Hall and a project in partnership with Orchard Hill College to provide a new autistic spectrum disorder and progression unit on the Carshalton site for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There has been a significant reduction in adult provision in the last year.

Local schools include some of the top-performing schools nationally and the college has made the decision not to compete with the academic programmes offered in the 14 local secondary school sixth forms. The majority of students from Sutton are from three local schools which have low levels of academic performance. The college's curriculum is strongly vocational, with courses ranging from pre-entry to degree level. The college is the largest provider of work-based learning programmes in the London South Learning and Skills Council (LSC) area and has a Train to Gain contract for 2007/08. There is a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in childcare and early years education and the college also leads a joint CoVE in Electro-Technical in partnership with Bromley College.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates for long and short courses?	Reasonable progress
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The college provision has changed significantly between 2005/06 and 2006/07, with a significant reduction in adult provision. The college exceeded its adult targets by over £400,000 in 2005/06, but following changes in funding decided to cease much of its community-based learning work, its franchised provision and some of its ESOL and employability work. FTEs for post-19 long courses dropped by around 1600. The results-to-date for 2006/07, which may improve once the data is complete, show that since 2003/04, success rates on long courses for adults have improved by 9%, and for 16-18 year olds by 12%. Both are around the national average. Success rates on short courses, which represent 6% of college provision, have dropped by 2% since 2005/06.

What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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Overall there has been reasonable progress in improving success rates for apprentices. There has been significant progress in improving success rates in care apprenticeships from 36% in 2004/05 to 73% at period nine in 2006-07. There has also been significant progress in improving success rates in engineering apprenticeships from 62% in 2004/05 to 94% at period nine in 2006/07. There has been insufficient progress in improving success rates in hairdressing apprenticeships from 20% in 2004/05 to 37% at period nine in 2006/07. There have been significant improvements in achieving key skills in care and engineering, with no difference in achievement of frameworks or NVQs. Although improved, key skills are still one of the factors impacting on achievement of hairdressing frameworks.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing a more rigorous lesson observation scheme that can be used to improve the quality and consistency of teaching?	Reasonable progress
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The college has three years of comparative data on the results of teaching observations that clearly reflect improvements in some areas, with dips in teaching profiles in other areas clearly evidenced to changes in staff. Senior staff have a clear view of the standards of teaching across the college. Appropriate strategies have been introduced for observation since the previous inspection. A trained central observation team conducts at least annual observations of staff, with peer and external moderation in place. Completed observation paperwork is also reviewed for thoroughness. A team of advanced practitioners provide support for new or underperforming staff across curriculum areas, while also focusing on particular themes, such as e-learning or integration of basic or key skills into the curriculum. Appropriate common issues have been identified in some curriculum areas, such as lesson planning, enabling focused support to be given. The college is involved in peer review with two local colleges.

What improvements have been made in the use of individual learning plans in setting targets and monitoring progress of learners?	Insufficient progress
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The college has taken steps to improve the quality of its individual learning plans (ILPs). Staff have been trained in target-setting and ways of embedding basic and key skills targets into the process. Sampling of completed 2006/07 ILPs showed examples of clear targets being set and of progress over time being seen. However, the process is not yet consistently applied across the college. Some targets continue to be too general to be meaningful to learners, and the approach has not allowed for individual differences of learners to be reflected in monitoring progress. Learners do not always complete the pro-forma themselves. Different systems are used to capture progress, but these are not reflected in the ILP. The college has introduced a new format for the 2007/08 academic year, including a useful new section on progress in basic and key skills. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

What actions have been taken to improve the embedding of basic (literacy, numeracy and language support) and key skills in the vocational curriculum?	Reasonable progress
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The embedding of basic and key skills has been a priority development for the college. All vocational programmes have an hour a week of discrete taught time. Specialist and vocational staff have worked together to embed basic and key skills into the curriculum. All learners take an on-line initial assessment, which is used in the planning of the curriculum. Staff have worked in vocational teams to identify basic and key skills needed to complete courses, building these into lesson planning. The revised teaching observation scheme includes a section on basic and key skills. Key and basic skills results improved by 18% and 12% respectively over the past year.

Leadership and management

What actions have been taken to improve the sharing of good practice?	Reasonable progress
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The college has improved the focus of quality assurance systems on spreading good practice since the previous inspection. Three annual good practice days for all staff have taken place, focusing on key curriculum issues such as supporting students and sharing resources for tutorials. Advanced practitioners have highlighted the benefits of mentoring and demonstrated use of e-learning materials. Several groups or individual staff members have been able to bid for support to develop good practice, such as team building resources, which have benefited several areas of the college. Good practice with learner course representatives is being implemented across the college. There has been a focus both internally and externally on improving retention, with partners from other colleges and the Connexions service. Data clearly shows interventions with at risk learners improved their retention, with further appropriate strategies being implemented at the start of this academic year. Good practice is being shared between partner colleges on areas such as tracking learner progress. Although there are many examples of mechanisms to spread good practice working, there has been slow progress in improving individual learning plans across the college.