

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Thanet College

Date of visit: 6 May 2008

Context

Thanet College is a general further education college located in the south-east of Kent. This is an area characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation. The unemployment rate is higher than the national average and the area receives significant funding to assist in its regeneration. The college operates within a selective system of secondary education. This monitoring visit follows the inspection in December 2006 and an annual assessment visit in June 2007.

Achievement and standards

How successful has the college been in improving success rates of learners aged 16-18?	Reasonable progress
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The college reports that in 2006/07 the overall success rates for 16-18 year olds was 69%, four points above the previous year's rates and is now just below the national average. Overall success rates for Level 1, 2 and 3 learners have increased since the previous year 2005/06. However, Level 1 and 3 learners are more successful than those at Level 2. Level 2 success rates are still below national average by two points. Level 3 success rates show significant improvements, from 59% to 71% for all courses and are above the national average by three points.

The college attributes the improving success rates to the measures they have acted upon since the previous inspection. As well as the attention they have taken in retaining learners, there have been improved processes for observing teaching and learning with a variety of actions to resolve identified areas for improvement. For example more specific support has been provided for those learners needing to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Are retention rates still improving? If they are, how well?	Reasonable progress
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The college continues to use a range of measures to improve retention rates. Rates have continued to rise. The overall retention rate for the college in 2006/07 was 83%, 3% higher than the final retention rate of the previous year. For 16-18 year olds the retention rate has risen from 81% in 2005/06 to 83% for 2006/07. For

those learners aged 19 or over the increase is slightly higher increasing from 80% to 84% for the same period. Both these rates however, are still below the national average. Retention rates for 2007/08 are showing a further increase with a rate of 90% currently for all learners.

Quality of provision

What progress has the college made in improving the provision of language support for ESOL and EFL learners?	Reasonable progress
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Actions taken since the previous inspection have included a revision of learners' individual learning plans. They have been more appropriately designed and are easier for learners to understand. Communication between English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) staff team and other teaching staff across the college has improved. Specialist staff now have more involvement at the pre-entry interview stage. A variety of staff development and training events have taken place and are aimed at improving awareness of ESOL and EFL needs of learners and those support arrangements that are available. Over the past year the four day study skills induction course, originally designed for EFL learners now also includes ESOL learners.

What progress has the college made in increasing the proportion of teaching which is good or better?	Reasonable progress
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College data indicates that the proportion of good or better lessons in 2007/8 have improved from 64% to 80%. The improved observation programme has enabled managers to identify development priorities for key college staff and provides more targeted support to teachers. The newly appointed improvement facilitators are starting to impact upon teaching practice and the college is using them well to develop teacher's abilities to evaluate their own performance. These new staff development initiatives together with a clear management focus has enabled the college to see a rise in learner retention in some areas of its work.

The revised lesson observation scheme enables managers to have a clear understanding of the learner experience within their departments. There is insufficient evidence however, in a small minority of records of lesson observations to justify the grade the college has awarded. These records also demonstrated insufficient focus on learner outcomes or progress made by learners.

How successful are management in setting and meeting targets for learner recruitment?	Reasonable progress
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The college has exceeded its target with regards to 16 to 18 year old recruitment by over 10%. Since the college development plan update there is a much improved picture in respect of adult learner recruitment, which now stands at 1004 full time

equivalent enrolments, just above the predicted target of 1000. Successful measures have been put in place to raise both adult and 16 to 18 year old recruitment. For example the re-introduction of a 'September guarantee' for 16 to 18 year old learners to confirm course places early, a review of the course promotion and increased attendance at public events.

Recruitment targets for Train to Gain were achieved last year. Programmes this year however have substantially under recruited learners and to date the college has achieved only a third of its in-year target of 90. Managers are currently reviewing market intelligence to develop a strategy to effectively promote this provision, which was predominately in the area of care. New initiatives have involved extending the offer to include cleaning and support, and school support services. This review has been slow in addressing the current under-recruitment. The college is nearing its targets for work based learning, for both adults and 16 to 18 learners, having recruited 65 out of 90 16 to 18 year olds and 38 out of 42 adult learners. Effective course promotion and good employer links have enabled the college to improve its recruitment. The college is confident that it will achieve its target for this year.

Leadership and management

How successful has the college been in resolving inconsistencies in course performance?	Reasonable progress
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The college has improved its systems to assess course performance. It has identified inadequate provision in one curriculum area and has put several initiatives in place to bring about improvement. These include the appointment of a new head of department and mentoring and support for staff to improve teaching and learning. Closer monitoring of the department's performance by the college's senior management team has resulted in clear actions being taken to address underperformance, although it is too early to assess the full impact of these initiatives.

College senior managers have established a clear system to analyse departments' performance throughout the year. Staff understand their role in improving the quality of provision within the college and contribute to the departmental self-evaluation process. Self-assessment reports and action plans are closely monitored by the senior management team. Improved use of data by managers enables department heads to frequently check performance against key indicators.