

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: London Borough of Lewisham – Community Education
Date of visit: 12 and 13 March 2009

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in November 2007, at which Community Education Lewisham (CEL) was graded satisfactory overall, with satisfactory leadership and management, capacity to improve and equality of opportunity. Provision was judged to be good in information and communications technology (ICT) and satisfactory in three other subject areas inspected.

CEL is mainly funded by London East Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In addition to funding for personal and community development learning, and further education and other accredited provision, additional budgets are provided for family learning, family literacy, language and numeracy and for neighbourhood learning in deprived communities. Programmes are offered in four main centres, 12 community centres and other individual venues across the borough. Learner numbers, in 10 sector subject areas, have remained level, at about 6,400, over the past two years. Around 60% of these enrolments are on non-accredited courses. The two largest areas of provision are arts, media and publishing and preparation for life and work. Of those learners on courses in 2006/07, 80% were female and around 45% were from minority ethnic groups.

The management structure for CEL has been extensively revised; the process started just before the previous inspection in 2007 and the final appointments to new posts were made in early 2009. A new permanent service manager has been in post for about seven months. The management team now includes three curriculum area managers and 13 curriculum leaders.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has been made in improving achievements and standards, particularly success rates on accredited courses?	Reasonable Progress
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At the previous inspection achievements and standards were satisfactory overall, but low success rates on accredited courses were a key area for improvement. Reasonable progress has been made in improving this area.

Overall success rates have increased year-on-year from 27% in 2004. At the 2007 inspection they had reached 47%; in 2007/08 they reached a satisfactory 67%.

Data for 2006/07 showed 16 aspects of the provision, in terms of sector subject area, level and length of course, below acceptable minimum levels of performance. In 2007/08 all with the exception of one had improved, with 12 being above, or well above minimum levels. Improving, but remaining below minimum levels, are preparation for life and work, with level 1 and 2 long courses at 50% (up from 39% and 46% respectively) and arts, media and publishing level 2 short courses at 60% (up from 48%). Preparation for life and work represents about 15% of all learners.

CEL's post-inspection action planning to improve success rates includes significantly improved advice and guidance, more thorough enrolment procedures and entry standards. Improved observations of teaching and learning are having a positive impact on standards. The recording of achievement has been greatly improved. Monitoring of attendance and action on learner absences is much more effective. Half way through the current year retention is generally good at 90% or better.

Quality of provision

To what extent has progress been made to ensure changes to the learning sessions observations have helped with the quality of provision?	Reasonable progress
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The thoroughness of learning session observations was identified as a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. CEL has made reasonable progress in improving the effectiveness of its system and subsequent actions to improve teaching. Tutors receive detailed guidance on the observation scheme. New tutors are now observed teaching as part of selection and during a probationary period three observations are carried out. All observations include checking schemes of work, lesson planning, individual learning plans (ILPs), target-setting and monitoring, attendance and student views. Completed observations focus appropriately on both teaching and learning. Judgements are made that are supported by copies of documentation used in the observed session. The process is better managed, with thorough moderation, including some checking of grades based on the recorded findings rather than moderating a grade already given. All staff are observed, early observations are triggered by drops in attendance levels or complaints from learners. Areas for development are identified and improvement actions suggested to improve teaching depending on the outcome of observation, including peer observation and support on development areas such as ILPs. Observation is timely and continued underperformance well managed. An improved and effective emphasis has been placed on spreading good practice.

How much progress has been made to improve the planning and recording of learning?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection judged that target-setting and monitoring of progress for some learners was insufficiently thorough. Reasonable progress has been made in this aspect. All learners have three course targets recorded and monitored for full or partial completion along with personal targets. Recording and identification of targets is improving. To assist tutors, managers have produced examples of the kinds of targets and ILPs that are appropriate for learners on different types of courses. Initial assessment is more widespread than previously and is used to improve initial advice and guidance and appropriate level of course. Staff now share examples of their documentation. Managers' audit completed paperwork, helping to improve course and individual goals for individual tutors, encouraging greater consistency. A short course ILP has been introduced this year that mirrors learning objectives as course targets and gives learners the chance to set their own targets for what they want to achieve. Learners with learning difficulties have ILPs adapted for their use. Plans are in place for the use of electronic versions of ILPs and all curriculum leaders are taking assessment and verification qualifications, with the aim of further improving practice.

How much progress has been made in improving premises and resources, particularly information learning technology?	Significant progress
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Planning for updating and maintaining resources, particularly integrated learning technology, was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Significant progress has been made in both planning and improving premises and resources. A new computer suite at one centre contains industry standard hardware and software including an interactive whiteboard. Staff have been given the same software at home to help prepare lessons and familiarise themselves with the applications. All teaching rooms now have wireless computer access and projection facilities and 20 more interactive whiteboards have been ordered following the successful trial of their use. Appropriate staff development and support has been put in place to help staff use the technology effectively in their teaching. An attractive new centre has been built, which provides much improved ceramics teaching facilities and an improved experience for learners. It also includes two general classrooms replacing previously inadequate accommodation. All new and old accommodation is compliant with current disability legislation. A reduction in the number of premises has allowed maintenance funds to be used more effectively. A new maintenance support organisation is having a positive impact on the upkeep of the premises.

How much progress has been made to improve the provision in the preparation for life and work area?	Reasonable Progress
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Preparation for life and work was satisfactory at the previous inspection, but success rates, uninspiring teaching in literacy and numeracy and poor access to information learning technology were areas for improvement. CEL has made reasonable progress in improving these aspects. Learners are better informed about accreditation requirements and achievements are now far more accurately identified. Suitable preparation for examinations is an improving aspect of literacy provision. Initial advice and the management of learner absences by tutors and support staff have both improved. Retention has also improved. Success rates have gone up, with the 2007/08 literacy and numeracy rates moving up 16 points to 58% and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is up 19 points to 62%; in its self-assessment CEL accepts that there is still room for further improvements. Better support for tutors who are graded as satisfactory or inadequate is having some positive impact on standards; however, the target of 60% of observed lessons being good or better has not yet been achieved in literacy and numeracy. Resources are improving, though not all resources are being effectively used as yet. Managers, in the new structure, accept they have clearer roles for implementing quality improvement, and are implementing further changes that are also beginning to impact on learners.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made to better use management information to assist quality improvement?	Reasonable Progress
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Management information was not being used sufficiently by curriculum managers at the time of the previous inspection to monitor and carry out quality improvement. Reasonable progress has been made in this area. Routine data is now much more accurate and timely than previously. Managers no longer waste time maintaining their own detailed records, as they trust the central records. A suite of on-line reports is being continually developed and the reports now give managers appropriate data on such things as learner attendance and performance. Staff have had satisfactory individual training and support on using the reports. This data is now well used in the self-assessment process. Routine monitoring of attendance and retention is carried out well by most managers and appropriate action is taken where necessary. Data is satisfactorily used in programme planning and development. However, some management meetings do not yet routinely consider appropriate data, the use of data to set improvement targets is underdeveloped, and some subject areas are not as effective as others in their routine use of data.

How much progress has been made to use the support of external agencies to help improve the provision?	Reasonable progress
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CEL recognised through its self-assessment and quality improvement processes the need to improve aspects of both their management structure and quality improvement practice; to help with this they have sought, or were offered, help from external agencies. That support has contributed to reasonable progress in improving the relevant aspects. A management restructuring exercise was aided by consultants, paid for by CEL. This helped identify a simplified organisation. The consultancy also provided interim management support in the transitional phase before all full-time appointments were made. This allowed the provision to continue and improve without unnecessary pressure, ensuring that new appropriate appointments could be made in a reasonable timescale. Managers at all levels report that the new structure encourages closer working across different areas. The borough council senior management team have been very supportive in the changes that have been made. Support from the Quality Improvement Agency focused on particular curriculum areas. All areas identify benefits that will impact learners throughout CEL. These include improvements to the observation of teaching and learning through joint observations, improved use of data, programme planning, managing staff and areas such as equality and diversity. Managers worked closely with consultants and have improved in confidence and ability to self-assess more accurately and manage improvement. The local LSC has supported CEL in their accommodation strategy, particularly in funding the new ceramics block.

How much progress has been made to ensure staff reorganisation has improved the management of the service, and the self-assessment process?	Reasonable Progress
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CEL's staff reorganisation has taken nearly two years to complete. The last senior appointments have just been made however, as part of the planned implementation strategy temporary staff have been filling some of the management posts to ensure continuity. Despite the turbulence of the change the new structure has already had a reasonable impact on the provision. Staff are much clearer about their individual responsibilities in improving such things as success rates, and changing programmes to meet local and national requirements. Communication has improved, throughout the organisation. Tutors have better line management, monitoring and support arrangements. Support staff are grouped according to their role, rather than being just linked to a centre; this has resulted in better support staff development and improvement of such things as enrolment procedures and a quicker response to routine problems. A wider range of staff are now fully involved in self-assessment and improvement. Course reviews and area self-assessments are detailed, and the results, with good use of data, are now more effectively brought together in an improved straightforward, evaluative CEL self-assessment report. The results of this

self-assessment process are used in effective quality improvement plans at both provision and area levels.