

Leeds City College

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 135771

Name of lead inspector: Anne Taylor HMI

Last day of inspection: 11 March 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education college

Address: Park Lane Campus
Park Lane
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS3 1AA

Telephone number: 0845 0457275

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Leeds City College was formed in April 2009 by the dissolution and merger of Leeds Thomas Danby College, Leeds College of Technology and Leeds Park Lane and Keighley College. The principal and chief executive took up his position in July 2009.

Leeds City College is a large general further education college with over 57,000 enrolments, 2,300 staff and an annual turnover of £78 million. Approximately 7,500 students are aged between 16 and 18. The college provides courses for over 1,400 students aged between 14 and 16 in Leeds and Keighley. Around 15,000 students study in Community outreach centres. Over 15,000 students receive all their training in company. The college has approximately 560 apprentices and 8,000 Train to Gain learners. It offers courses in all 15 sector subject areas.

Around a third of students aged 16 to 18 are from minority ethnic backgrounds, three times more than in the local population. The majority of students are in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowances, half of them are from areas of disadvantage. Thirteen per cent of students declare a disability. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Leeds is above the national average.

The newly merged college has not yet been inspected. Leeds Thomas Danby and Leeds College of Technology were inspected in 2007 and were judged to be good. Leeds Park Lane was inspected in May 2006 and was judged to be good. Keighley College was judged inadequate in March 2006 and February 2008. The three sector subject areas re-inspected in February 2009 were judged satisfactory or good. Keighley College merged with Park Lane College in August 2007.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has the college made in improving and integrating self-assessment and quality assurance systems across the college and impacting on quality?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
---	--------------------------------

Since the formation of Leeds City College, managers have integrated rapidly the previously different self-assessment processes into one. The new process relates to the college's strategic aims and key priorities. Writers of the self-assessment report have standardised their style and approach through staff development. Senior managers, employers, governors and advanced practitioners moderated each departmental self-assessment report (SAR) rigorously. This process raised awareness of the need for greater realism and objectivity to make accurate judgements.

Students and staff are involved in the production of programme area SARs. The views of external stakeholders, however, are not obtained systematically at college level to inform the SAR. Target setting at departmental level is of variable quality; some targets are too general. Not all SARs recognise key weaknesses. The college improvement plan arising from 2008/09 self-assessment is detailed and comprehensive.

Clear key performance indicators are in place for major aspects of the college's work and are closely monitored, updated and re-forecasted. Much has been done in a short time to establish a unified system of continuous improvement from three different cultures and systems. Many improvement processes have been embedded but because of the recent merger, their impact is not yet fully evident.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in improving outcomes for all learners, especially learners aged 16 to 18? Reasonable Progress

In 2008/09, the year of the merger, student success rates for the combined college improved to above national rates. Success rates at Park Lane, the largest campus, improved substantially to well above the national rate. Success rates at the Thomas Danby Campus improved considerably and are close to the national rate. Success rates at the Technology Campus fell to below the national rate. Success rates are high on programmes for adult learners, whereas success rates for students aged 16 to 18 on programmes at levels 1 and 2 are around the national rates and on level 3 programmes are below national rates. While achievement rates are above national rates on programmes at all levels and ages, retention rates are below national rates on level 3 programmes for students aged 16 to 18. Early data suggest that retention is improving this year.

Success rates vary considerably between sector subject areas, at both ages. Substantial numbers of students study one or more key skills at the college. Success rates are high on application of number level 1 programmes, and around the national rate on communication and information and communication technology level 1 programmes and on all level 2 key skills programmes. Success rates are low on level 3 programmes.

The progress of many students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 programmes is low relative to their starting points and variable for students on level 1 and level 2 programmes. The college has not yet focused sufficiently on the measurement of students' progress.

At the time of the merger around 8,000 Train to Gain learners were enrolled. Success rates in 2008/09 were very high and the vast majority of learners achieved within the agreed timeframe.

What progress has the college made in improving the overall and timely framework completion rate of work-based learners? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, each of the legacy colleges has implemented a range of improvements to increase the success rates of learners on apprenticeship programmes. At the time of the merger, framework success rates, for the relatively small number of trainees on apprenticeship programmes, were above the national rate. The proportion achieving the framework within the agreed timeframe, however, was low in most sector subject areas and especially low in engineering and construction.

A new head of apprenticeships is bringing together apprenticeship delivery across the college. Improved tracking systems are ensuring closer monitoring of individual learner's progress and targeted support by the newly appointed 'retention' officer and key skills support tutor. Additional key skills workshops provide intensive coaching. In addition, a number of initiatives are addressing specific issues in different sector subject areas. Where these are especially successful, they are being extended.

Quality of Provision, Teaching and Learning

What progress has the college made in implementing the revised lesson observation process across the college? Significant progress

Since merger, the college has consulted on and implemented a more rigorous, centralised process for the observation of teaching and learning, building on existing good practice. The college is 'on target' to observe all staff, including agency staff, annually. Extensive training of both observers and observees has taken place with regular briefings arranged and detailed guidance published. The revised system incorporates the views of students. A thorough debriefing follows each observation and an improvement plan or opportunity to share good practice is agreed. When lessons are graded satisfactory or inadequate, staff have received rapid support, either from a mentor or advanced practitioner and most have improved on re-observation. The revised system links well with performance management frameworks. Regular reports on the quality of lessons are considered by governors and by managers at different levels throughout the college to inform decision making.

What progress has the college made in further improving the quality of teaching and learning so that all learners achieve their potential? Is good practice being shared across the campuses of the new college? Reasonable progress

Leeds City College's key priority in improving the quality of lessons is in a greater emphasis on students' learning. Staff are supported well through an extensive programme of development and by advanced practitioners and subject learning coaches. The increased focus on learning through technology has been embraced in some, but not all, curriculum areas. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is well designed, its use and development are monitored and publicised to encourage staff to share their learning materials on the VLE.

The college has addressed the sharing of good practice proactively. Working groups of staff from all the legacy colleges have been established to identify existing good practice. A number of cross college curriculum development days is planned during the year to highlight existing good practice. Staff feel valued as a result.

The college has identified the setting and monitoring of challenging targets as an area for further development. Inspectors agree that more needs to be done to identify students' potential and progress and to use 'learner information' more systematically in lesson planning.

It is too early for improvement measures to have impacted fully on the quality of teaching and learning or to have reduced the proportion of inadequate lessons.

Leadership and Management

What progress has the college made in establishing new structures and processes since merger? Are key priorities identified and disseminated across all campuses?

Significant progress

Key operational matters have been covered very efficiently by an interim 'college executive team'. The previously separate teams for estates, finance and human resources have been combined effectively. Governors and the new principal considered for one term what the senior structure should be and this is being implemented. Once completed full restructuring will occur. The communication process regarding priorities, restructuring and timescales is open and clear.

Governors have approved the college's mission, values, strategic priorities and key performance indicators to inform quality systems. The board is fully aware of national, regional and local priorities and has used them to determine college strategies. The annual operating statement informs team plans and targets for 2009/10 so that staff focus on the overarching strategies. Managers at all levels monitor action plans rigorously. Not all systems and structures are embedded fully, but staff are aware of the ambitious targets which governors and senior managers wish to achieve. The new college has managed its core business effectively while developing unified procedures and management across three legacy colleges on four sites.

What progress has the college made in setting and achieving aspirational targets for the new college? Significant progress

Managers and staff have set ambitious targets to generate significant external funding to meet local, regional and national objectives, many of which have already been met. This demonstrates the very effective collaborative working of staff from each of the previous colleges to share expertise. Managers have instigated robust and well-considered strategies in finance and human resources to meet college needs but also with due regard to the expected changes in external funding. Managers expect most of the ambitious, but realistic, overarching targets to be achieved, except for the numbers of, and funding for, apprentices aged 16 to 18. They anticipate a significant improvement in financial outturn as a result of improved systems, targets and monitoring.

Managers have refined their planning processes to ensure they can deliver their challenging targets through rigorous monitoring. They have also promoted realism and consideration of funding matters. They have used the best of their existing systems or have introduced new processes to provide best practice. Managers have used benchmarking data from a wide variety of sources to set appropriate targets. Governors and business support areas also have challenging performance indicators and targets as well as curriculum staff. Teams have the same targets as the overarching college ones, which ensures a commonality of approach and integrates the aims of the college. Middle managers' targets are also aspirational but realistic and consequently they predict increased students' success rates in 2009/10 compared with 2008/09.

Equality and Diversity

What progress has the college made in identifying the relative success of different groups of learners across the college and in implementing improvement plans? Is there any evidence of impact? Reasonable progress

The in-year retention rates for students from minority ethnic backgrounds are higher than at the same time last year and are well above outturn national averages. The college has a strong focus on supporting children in care. The actions undertaken to improve the underachievement of male students from a white background are being successful through, for example, monitoring and support officers, learning mentors and 'improve your grade' workshops. Success rates have improved for both age groups and are at or just below national averages. The success rates of a small number of students from some other minority ethnic backgrounds are just below their national averages. The college has insufficient data and knowledge on the progress of students from different backgrounds compared with their prior attainment and on their attendance and punctuality. Data and targets are not yet

available on the key performance indicator monitoring report for the retention and success rates of students from a minority ethnic background.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010