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East Norfolk Sixth Form College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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Inspection report

Audience	Published	Provider reference
Post-sixteen	May 2007	130767

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	East Norfolk Sixth Form College
Type of college:	Sixth Form College
Principal:	Laurie Poulson
Address of college:	Church Lane Gorleston Great Yarmouth Norfolk NR31 7BQ
Telephone number:	01493 662234
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Chair of governors:	Mark Duffield
Unique reference number:	130767
Name of lead inspector:	Ian Seath, HMI
Dates of inspection:	19 – 23 March 2007

Background of the organisation

1. East Norfolk Sixth Form College is a relatively small college in Gorleston, Norfolk. At the time of inspection, around 1,300 students attended, the large majority being aged 16-18 and studying GCE AS and A level courses full-time. The college is the only provider of A level provision, and draws students from a wide and predominantly rural catchment area of east Norfolk and north Suffolk. Many of the nearby areas are characterised by relatively high deprivation, and levels of unemployment are high. Most of the college's students are white British. The college's mission statement is 'Excellence and Care: the College is working for its community'.
2. The majority of the college's provision is GCE AS and A level courses, which it offers in a wide range of subjects. Around 20% of its students are enrolled on vocational provision, mainly First or National Diploma courses. A small number of students aged 19 and over study at level 1, mainly information and communication technology (ICT) courses in one of the college's three outreach centres. Most adult students study part-time. The college has relatively low admission criteria for a sixth form college. Students are able to retake GCSE mathematics and English, together with a number of other subjects at this level. The college has a new science teaching block and sports facilities. Enrolments have increased markedly in recent years.

Scope of the inspection

3. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and students' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

4. Achievements and standards are good and have improved recently. The college has low admission criteria for entry to courses at level 3, but despite this, students achieve very well and make good progress. Success rates at GCE A level are around the national average, but the proportion of students who achieve the highest grades A and B is high and rising. GCSE results for mathematics and English are good, particularly for students retaking these subjects. Students respond well to the challenging targets which the college sets them. The retention of adult students on courses at level 1 is low.
5. Teaching and learning are good. The college's lesson observation system is accurate and systematic, though it does not pay sufficient attention to the monitoring of equality and diversity. The standard of students' written and practical work is good. Marking of written work is usually thorough, though feedback is not always detailed enough. Students are clear about what they need to do to improve, but long term targets are often too imprecise. The initial assessment of additional learning needs is effective, and support provided promptly.
6. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. The extensive range of GCE AS and A level subjects, vocational courses and enrichment activities meets the needs of students aged 16-18. The college has increased and widened participation by expanding its curriculum. Students benefit from the college's strong relationships with external agencies.
7. Support and guidance for students are good. Induction processes are effective and advice and guidance ensure that students are well informed. Support for academic study is very good and well attended. Support for those students with additional literacy or numeracy needs is underdeveloped. The tutorial system is effective, though targets set are not always precise enough. Support for higher education applications and careers advice is good, and links with external agencies are well developed. Students enjoy their time at the college and they value the support they receive from staff.
8. Leadership and management are good. The college has coped well with a period of rapid growth in numbers. Achievement and standards have improved. Governors are effective in their role. Financial management is good. The assurance of quality is good. Management of the curriculum is good. The college has an accurate view of teaching and learning, and the sharing of good practice is improving. The college complies with its obligations for child protection, race relations, and disability discrimination. The monitoring of performance is good. The college's self-assessment is largely accurate.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

9. The college demonstrates good capacity to improve. The college's strategic direction is clear and well understood by staff. Governors and managers remain committed to maintaining the college's strong financial position and making significant investments in new accommodation. Quality assurance arrangements are effective. Managers are increasingly effective in securing improved success rates for students, though the rate of improvement has been too slow on a few courses and the overall success rate remains around the national average. Robust information systems are used to monitor performance. The self-assessment process is rigorous, judgements are largely accurate and the college recognises what improvements are still required.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

10. The college has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement noted in the 2003 inspection. All the key strengths at the last inspection have been maintained or further improved. Since the last inspection, the college has modified and improved arrangements for group tutorials and has strengthened the support for the current low number of adult learners. Alongside significant growth at level 3, the college has been able to extend the range of opportunities to study at level 2, though not at level 1. Although accommodation and resources have improved for most curriculum areas, there is still more to be done and further accommodation improvements are scheduled.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- students make very good progress
- good teaching and learning
- good sports, recreational, and extra-curricular facilities
- effective management of change and growth
- good and improving quality assurance
- good leadership and management at all levels.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates on some courses
- the provision of support for literacy and numeracy
- the monitoring of the effectiveness of support
- some poor accommodation e.g. mobiles.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

11. The majority of the college's students undertake GCE AS and A level courses. Most students are aged 16-18. Success rates at level 1 are high for students aged 16-18, and around the national average for adults. At level 2, success rates are good overall, and around the national average for colleges of this type for GCSE courses. Success rates for the large number of students taking GCSE English and mathematics are high, and improved markedly in 2005/06. At level 3, which represents the large majority of students, success rates are around the national average and have shown recent improvement. Success rates for key skills are around the low national average for colleges of this type. Success rates are high for the many students who take National Diploma courses. Retention rates are close to the national averages for levels 2 and 3. For students aged 19 and over, however, retention on level 1 courses is significantly lower than the national figure. Retention on GCE AS and A level courses is close to the national average with recent improvements.
12. Students achieve well and make very good progress, often much better than would be expected on the basis of their GCSE results alone. Value added data indicate a very good overall picture in both GCE A and AS courses. Within this positive picture, however, a few subjects do not perform well, for example general studies. Students make exceptionally good progress in a few subjects, for example in biology, French, physical education (PE) and geology.
13. Students acquire good study skills which enable them to respond well to the challenging targets that they are set. The proportion of students who achieve the highest grades is significantly above the national average and has increased markedly in the last two years. Many subjects, for example law, mathematics and media studies achieve a high proportion of high grades whilst having relatively large numbers of students. For A level courses, the proportion of students achieving high grades improved from significantly below the national average in 2004/05, to well above in 2005/06. Marked improvements have also been evident in AS courses.
14. Progression to further and higher education is good. Attendance is good. The college does not systematically evaluate the success of students receiving additional learning support; however, those students who attend extra subject support sessions achieve better than those who do not.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

15. Teaching and learning are good, and this judgement agrees with the college's self-assessment. A new and more rigorous internal lesson observation system ensures consistency of approach and judgement. However, the monitoring of equality and diversity issues in lesson observations is insufficient. The lesson observation system evaluates learning well and identifies relevant areas for improvement. Observation outcomes link effectively with the appraisal and staff development processes. Managers share good teaching practice on the college's intranet. The college has reduced the proportion of inadequate teaching and learning and has appropriate strategies to improve satisfactory teaching and learning.
16. In the best lessons, teachers plan well. Students undertake a wide range of learning activities, including appropriate use of information learning technology and other resources. Teachers arrange learning activities well to satisfy the needs of students of differing abilities. Students are attentive, involved in learning, and willing to support each other in group work. In the less effective lessons, teachers miss opportunities to involve students in the recollection of previous topics. They do not challenge students sufficiently when introducing new topics and do not check sufficiently that learning is taking place. Students' behaviour is very good. The standard of students' written and practical work is good. Students enjoy their lessons and appreciate the excellent subject support they receive outside lessons in study extension time. Relationships between students and teachers are exemplary.
17. All students undergo an initial assessment of their additional learning needs and managers ensure that additional support is provided promptly. However, managers do not organise literacy and numeracy support systematically, nor do they evaluate its impact fully. Students' individual learning plans (ILPs) are sufficiently rigorous. Evenings for parents and carers prioritise those students causing concern and are very successful. Only two formal reviews occur in a year and consequently students' targets are long-term and general. Very effective short-term target setting occurs in parts of the college, but not in others. Departmental assessment policies are detailed. Marking of students' work is thorough. Standardisation meetings are rigorous and comprehensive. However, feedback to students is inconsistent: it is not always sufficiently detailed and does not always advise students on how to improve.
18. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is good. It offers a very wide range of GCE AS and A level subjects and vocational courses which meets the needs and interests of its students, aged 16-18, very well. In the last five years, the college has managed rapid growth, whilst sustaining the quality of its provision. Managers have successfully introduced level 2 and vocational courses to improve choice, widen participation and enable progression. The great majority of applicants obtain their preferred choice of subjects and course combinations.

19. Provision at level 1 is relatively small, as is provision for adults and for part-time students. A minority of students undertake communications key skills at level 2, but no other key skills are offered. The proportion of students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds reflects that of the local community. The college has very effective links with schools, colleges and employers, which benefit students' progression and development. However, much greater use of the college's facilities could be made by employers. Students benefit from the range of wide and varied enrichment activities. Students make a positive contribution to college life and to that of the community through fund raising and charitable activities. Students feel safe and secure in the college.
20. Support and guidance for students are good. Recruitment and induction procedures are thorough. Individual advice and separate taster sessions ensure students make well informed decisions. Effective systems identify literacy and numeracy needs through initial assessment with onward referral. However, there is no systematic monitoring of the impact on students' progress of the subsequent support provided. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified and assessed early to ensure that support arrangements are in place.
21. Support for students' academic study is very good. They are allocated a personal tutor with whom they have regular contact. A carefully planned system of tutorial support links to general studies. Weekly attendance is monitored closely. Tutorials include study skills, equality awareness, health and safety and other issues to help students maximise study opportunities. However, students do not receive a copy of their tutorial discussions and clear, precise targets are not always set. Those seeking work have structured support through the Connexions service. Effective referrals to local agencies are available through college welfare officers. General studies and the tutorial system make effective contributions to students' awareness of health and safety issues.
22. Students feel very well supported by staff. They benefit from extra subject support time and attendance at these has a positive impact on achievement. Very supportive teachers are accessible to students, and regularly give of their free time to help and support them. Guidance for applications to higher and further education is good.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

23. Leadership and management are good. The vision and commitment from governors and senior managers have guided the college well through a period of rapid growth. Since the last inspection in 2003, the number of full-time students has increased by 78%. Growth and change have been very well managed and the college continues to improve the quality of its provision. The governors discharge their responsibilities effectively. Their clear strategic view is well informed by the useful reports provided by management. Governors are thorough and systematic in their monitoring of financial and academic performance.

24. The quality assurance system is effective in bringing about improvement. Self-assessment procedures across the curriculum are systematic and largely accurate. Curriculum teams make good use of on-line statistical data to inform their judgements. The teaching and learning observation system gives managers an accurate view of the standards of teaching. Appropriate strategies are used to capture the views of parents and students. Key areas for improvement are clearly identified, and challenging targets help raise performance. Self-assessment processes for support services and governance are underdeveloped.
25. Management of the curriculum is good. Heads of faculties and departments work closely with senior managers and communications are clear. Curriculum managers give high priority to improving subjects and courses where performance is below expectations. Staff appraisal is effective. Staff development opportunities following appraisal are well focused on improvement. The appraisal of senior managers is, however, currently behind schedule. The college works very closely and productively with partner schools. Managers are keen to widen participation in education beyond the age of 16 and have clear and successful strategies to raise young people's aspirations.
26. The college fully meets the requirements of child protection legislation. The strong focus on equal opportunities throughout the college includes appropriate responses under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). Managers analyse data relating to the admissions and performance of different groups of learners and consider strategies to address imbalances, though with varying degrees of success. Almost all areas of the college are accessible by people with limited mobility. Health and safety monitoring is effective.
27. Financial management is good. Accommodation and facilities are now of a high standard in many curriculum areas. Sports and recreational facilities are good. Digital projection and computing facilities are also good but social facilities and a few aspects of the teaching accommodation remain unsatisfactory, notably a few mobile classrooms. The rapid growth in student numbers has placed pressure on the availability and suitability of accommodation. With effective financial management, good resource utilisation and improving success rates by students, the college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	132	68	67	1	52	62	57	5
	04/05	312	84	64	20	108	71	56	15
	05/06	321	88	NA	NA	103	53	NA	NA
GNVQs and precursors	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
Other	03/04	132	68	66	2	52	62	58	4
	04/05	312	84	63	21	108	71	56	15
	05/06	321	88	NA	NA	103	53	NA	NA

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	589	78	74	4	57	53	55	-2
	04/05	671	86	73	13	95	46	55	-9
	05/06	747	82	NA		45	71	NA	
GCSEs	03/04	361	75	77	-2	39	59	62	-3
	04/05	363	81	78	3	48	58	65	-7
	05/06	469	76	NA		35	71	NA	
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	22	77	73	4	0	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	0	NA	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	NA
	05/06	0	NA	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	NA
NVQs	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
Other	03/04	206	84	68	16	18	39	52	-13
	04/05	308	91	62	29	47	34	51	-17
	05/06	280	91	NA	NA	11	64	NA	

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	3986	76	80	-4	29	55	57	-2
	04/05	4059	76	82	-6	65	58	59	-1
	05/06	4181	79	NA	NA	72	60	NA	NA
A/A2 Levels	03/04	1142	85	91	-6	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	1473	88	92	-4	*	NA	NA	NA
	05/06	1280	91	NA	NA	22	68	NA	NA
AS Levels	03/04	2769	74	76	-2	*	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	2501	69	78	-9	52	52	54	-2
	05/06	2815	73	NA	NA	49	55	NA	NA
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	40	0	68	-68	0	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	0	NA	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	NA
	05/06	0	NA	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	NA
NVQs	02/03								
	03/04								
	04/05								
Other	03/04	35	86	63	23	0	NA	NA	NA
	04/05	85	67	72	-5	0	NA	NA	NA
	05/06	89	76	NA	NA	0	NA	NA	NA