

Weymouth College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Weymouth College had its last full inspection in May 2010. At that inspection all cross-college aspects were judged to be satisfactory, including overall effectiveness. Safeguarding was judged to be good. In subject areas, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, visual arts and media and literacy and numeracy were judged to be good. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) was judged to be inadequate.

A monitoring visit in May 2011 found that the college had made reasonable progress in improving some cross-college aspects of its work, but had made inadequate progress in improving ICT provision and in promoting equality and diversity.

Provision in ICT was removed from the college's curriculum offering and no students were recruited for this area of work in September 2011. Under these circumstances it was not possible to reinspect this provision.

This visit focused on progress with regard to improvements in quality assurance and self-assessment, students' outcomes and the promotion of equality and diversity.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in making quality assurance sufficiently evaluative and accurate in order to drive further improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The self-assessment report for 2011 presents a clear and more realistic picture of the college's provision. It is evaluative and comprehensive. Judgements provide a fair reflection of the evidence on which they are based. The evidence base includes an analysis of the quality of teaching and learning and a close focus on student performance data. Subject reports now make a clear link between these two elements. These reports are detailed and supported by appropriate action plans. The self-assessment report and the quality systems behind its production provide a solid platform on which the college can drive improvement. However, in building this more realistic picture of the provision, many of the self-assessed grades for subjects and for capacity to improve have gone down. The system has yet to fully prove its worth as one that leads to consistent improvement across the college.

There are some good examples of significant improvements. For example, work in the health and social care area has improved over the last year. Success rates have risen by 18 percentage points and are now approaching 90%. This is a result of a more systematic approach to quality assurance, improved support to help teachers to improve their work and closer links to a subject area that consistently performs well.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving students' outcomes?

Reasonable progress

Overall success rates in 2011 improved by around 2.5 percentage points to 80.2%. This remains one percentage point below the national average, but the college has closed the gap somewhat on the improving national averages for last year. For younger students, the college's success rates remained static at around the national average. The most notable improvement was for older students where success rates rose by five percentage points, bringing them close to the national average. The college subscribes to a commercial service that allows them to monitor retention rates for their current cohort of students and compare them with national figures. These data show that the college's retention rates at the time of the visit were much higher than at the same time last year and are well above the national averages. However, there is no consistent pattern of improvement in success rates at all levels of courses across the college over the last three years. In general, older students have better chances of success on foundation level courses, while younger students do well on advanced courses. Overall and timely success rates on apprenticeships continued to decline in 2011. There are clear action plans in place to rectify this specific area of provision, but this is a long-standing problem that requires urgent and effective action.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons by sharing good practice between areas?

Significant progress

The college has worked hard to improve the promotion of equality and diversity since the last inspection visit and this work is paying dividends. There have been significant improvements in the success rates for all students who have learning difficulties and their performance is now much more closely aligned to students who do not have learning difficulties. This is especially significant for older students where both groups perform equally as well. Lesson observation records now show many more examples of good practice in equality and diversity. Observers of teaching and learning are focusing well on this aspect. The good practice they identify is used to inform staff training. There is also a growing bank of materials to support teachers in their work in this area on the college's intranet. Many of these examples come from the good practice observed in lessons. A significant amount of staff training has taken place and has been well received by all staff. The focus for the training is on ensuring that the culture of the college reflects respect for all and a confidence to challenge any incidents of inappropriate behaviour either inside or outside lessons. New systems have been established to report any incidents of harassment or bullying and these are monitored closely and responded to well by managers. Students confirm that the college is a welcoming place for all.

What actions has Weymouth College taken regarding the future of its ICT provision?

No students are studying on any specialist ICT courses currently and no planned recruitment is taking place for this year. Under these conditions there could be no reinspection of this provision. College managers fully realise that provision in ICT therefore remains inadequate. If significant ICT provision is reintroduced at the college before any subsequent inspection, it would be appropriate to select the area for inspection and grading.

Provision in ICT was judged to be inadequate in the inspection in 2010 and progress to improve this provision was judged insufficient in the monitoring visit in 2011. The college has struggled to improve this provision. They have attempted to recruit specialist staff without success. Few students in 2011 applied to study in this area. Those who did apply were carefully guided towards other appropriate provision in the college or elsewhere. Managers and governors took the decision to withdraw altogether from specialist ICT provision. Notes of their meetings show that they fully considered all their options and decided that if they could not raise the quality of their provision they would rather withdraw from it altogether.

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