

The Manchester College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Bev Barlow HMI

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Address: Ashton Old Road
Manchester
M11 2WH

Telephone number: 0161 953 2242

Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

The Manchester College was established on 1 August 2008 and is the largest further education college in England with 20 sites covering the wider city area. In 2010/11 it enrolled around 10,000 full-time learners of whom two thirds are aged 16 to 18 and a further 8,600 students, mostly adults, on part-time courses. It delivered work-based training to 1,049 apprentices and 4,150 Train to Gain learners. Around 650 pupils from local schools study at the college and it delivers a broad range of higher education courses to 1,760 learners. It is the largest national provider of offender learning covering 77 establishments.

Manchester is one of the most deprived local authorities in England. Many learners join the college with very low levels of prior attainment, low literacy and numeracy skills, and complex personal and social needs. Around half of all learners study at foundation level, a third at intermediate and a fifth at advanced level. Around two thirds of learners are of White British heritage and the remainder cover a very diverse ethnic mix.

This is the first monitoring visit since the inspection in May 2011 when the overall effectiveness of the college was judged to be satisfactory, as were achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management. Capacity to improve and equality of opportunity were judged good and safeguarding was judged to be outstanding. Provision in health and social care; hairdressing and beauty therapy; visual and performing arts; and business administration and law were all judged to be satisfactory. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL were judged good and construction was found to be inadequate.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has the college made in developing a more robust and self-critical approach to self-assessment and course reviews?

Reasonable progress

Since the inspection, considerable effort has gone into strengthening quality assurance processes with a more extensive quality improvement calendar. More attention is given to the setting of targets for retention, achievement and success rates on a course-by-course basis. A single course review is now produced for each distinct qualification and, where necessary, differentiated by site. Summary course reviews collect key data and act as a bridge to curriculum self-assessment reports.

An operational quality improvement group validates curriculum self-assessment reports and course reviews, and is starting to share good practice. Early indicators are that curriculum self-assessment reports are more reliable. Performance data are

analysed and more effectively support outcome judgements. The evidence to support identified strengths is more convincing. Course reviews make better use of students' views and pay more attention to how managers monitor progress against action plans. However, at both course and curriculum area levels, evaluation of the progress learners make and of the quality of teaching and learning remains underdeveloped. The college's self-assessment report suggests that since the inspection most aspects of the college's performance have improved to good but it does not provide sufficient evidence to substantiate this.

Outcomes for learners

What progress made has the college made in improving outcomes for students, particularly success rates on main qualifications?

Reasonable progress

The college's overall success rate increased by three percentage points in 2010/11 but remains below that of similar colleges. The college now ensures that students entered for the additional course in personal employability and reflective learning (PEARL) are enrolled on an appropriate level within six weeks; as a consequence, the success rate of PEARL has declined from the exceptionally high rate seen at the inspection to 85%.

In 2010/11, the success rates of adult learners are broadly in-line with those seen in similar colleges. Despite overall improvements in the success rates for learners aged 16 to 18, they remain below the national averages, particularly at entry and foundation levels. Managers are aware that learners of Bangladeshi origin do not achieve as well as their peers and are now closely monitoring their performance.

Success rates on main programmes of study have improved, primarily as a result of higher pass rates although there remain too many courses where they are low. Retention remains a key issue for the college. The success rate on Train to Gain is high and the proportion of learners achieving in the planned time is well above the national average. However, for the smaller but increasing number of apprentices, success rates remain below the national average and in 2010/11 only 42% achieved in the planned time. The success rate on short courses improved to just below the national average.

What progress has the college made in reducing the number of early leavers and transfers, to improve retention, attendance and punctuality?

Significant progress

Following the inspection, the college has made appropriate changes to the entry requirements for learners to study the different levels of courses across all subjects.

The curriculum has been revised and there are now far more options available at entry and foundation levels that better meet the needs and abilities of learners. The enrolment procedures for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults have been revised and managers have closely monitored their implementation across sites.

Induction programmes on each course are now more consistently applied across different centres. The improved use of the student information management system enables staff to monitor individual student attendance and progress more carefully. All students now complete a common first assignment as part of their induction programme. The student review boards enable staff to discuss individual performance, using a good range of available evidence, and thus ensure that their students are placed on the right course. Attendance and punctuality are now more closely monitored. Attendance has improved and early retention data show an increase on the same point last year, although last year the college subsequently lost too many students in the second half of the year.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in improving lesson planning to ensure that all teachers use a range of strategies that provide sufficient stretch, support and challenge for all learners?

Reasonable progress

Since the inspection, the college has undertaken a robust review of its internal lesson observation process and has implemented a good range of changes. The number of observers has been reduced and additional training has been provided, joint observations are completed with senior moderators to improve the consistency of grading and managers no longer observe staff in their team. The outcomes from observations inform performance management and the key themes for staff training and development. A mentor is allocated to new teachers and those requiring support. Peer observations are encouraged and good practice is being shared across sites and between subject areas. Managers now complete walk-through observations based on specific themes but these have not yet been used to their full potential.

Staff have benefited from a good range of training and development activities. Lesson plans and schemes of work are used more consistently and there are some good learning materials on the college's virtual learning environment, although this varies significantly between subjects. The college recognises that there is still much to do in developing the use of information learning technologies to support learning. During the monitoring visit inspectors found several examples of where the lesson objectives were not clearly explained and the activities did not challenge learners. Consequently, the learning in these lessons was limited.

How effective are the actions taken to implement a consistent approach to ensure that learners have clear targets that are monitored closely?**Reasonable progress**

Students' minimum target grades are now set during induction and recorded on their individual learning plan and the electronic student information system. These targets, along with detailed pre-enrolment attainment, literacy and numeracy scores and any additional needs requirements, are easily accessible to tutors which helps them to monitor students' progress more closely.

A team of staff have developed an electronic individual learning plan which has significant potential when it is rolled out across the college in September 2012. It is currently being trialled with around 1,000 students aged 16 to 18 and some adult groups in health and social care. The system currently includes marks awarded for assignments and weekly attendance data. On-going modifications are being made following staff and student feedback. The feedback is very positive and students access the electronic system regularly to monitor their own progress. Short-term targets are now more specific and useful for students to help them to ultimately achieve their long term goals. All staff have access to the electronic learning plans and this facilitates better communications. Personal tutors can quickly get a good overview of their tutees' individual performance and put in place more prompt intervention strategies when required. However, the majority of students still have a paper-based individual learning plan. The quality of the targets and the use of these plans to monitor individual student performance remain far too variable.

Leadership and management**What progress have senior managers made in improving the accountability of curriculum managers?****Significant progress**

The accountability of curriculum managers for course and curriculum performance is now more firmly established. Integrated, electronic recording and monitoring systems now provide curriculum managers and tutors with ready access to detailed data reports which enable them to monitor more closely and regularly how well the curriculum area and individual courses are performing against targets. This improved access to extensive data through the student information management system has also resulted in earlier intervention to address concerns. Curriculum managers feel that they now have the tools to perform their roles effectively. Consequently, they have become more positive about taking responsibility and being held to account.

The performance planning process, which continues to be the main vehicle for curriculum and course target setting, is followed by termly management reviews of how each curriculum area is performing. This year, targets for retention, achievement and success have been established for each course and curriculum staff had more opportunity to be involved in setting course-specific targets. In addition to

accountability secured through the management review and operational quality improvement group processes, competence-based arrangements to monitor individual staff performance and support their progression are now being applied across the college. Ultimately curriculum managers are held to account through the line management arrangements. The wide range of processes for reviewing and supporting the performance of curriculum areas is designed to promote greater consistency and higher standards in curriculum management and provides timely evidence for assessing curriculum managers' performance.

How much progress has been made by managers to enable governors to monitor the performance of the college more effectively?

Insufficient progress

Governors have responded positively to the inspection and particularly to the need for them to monitor and review outcomes for learners more effectively. Their request for the post-inspection action plan to be re-formulated, so that it is cross-referenced more clearly to the main areas for improvement in the inspection report, is indicative of a greater willingness to challenge managers. They have plans to re-order the agendas of board meetings to give more prominence to monitoring the academic performance of the college.

Training has been planned to give governors a better understanding of learner outcomes data, benchmarking and data management issues. Unfortunately this had to be postponed and is due to take place shortly. Governors have delayed their approval of the 2010/11 self-assessment report until after the training. The format of improved reporting of learner outcomes has yet to be agreed. College managers feel that the scale and complexity of college provision make it difficult to strike the right balance between detail and simplicity. The senior managers' reporting of 2010/11 outcomes for learners continued to lack key information, such as national averages for all headline success rates, value-added scores and short course performance. The presentation of the data did not include a sufficiently robust critical evaluation. Consequently, governors are not yet more strongly positioned to monitor and challenge managers about the college's performance.

Construction

What progress have managers made in improving success rates on construction courses?

Reasonable progress

Success rates on most courses have risen since the last inspection, with significant improvements made to success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on foundation and intermediate level courses. At advanced level, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have risen slightly since the inspection but remain well below corresponding national averages. Success rates for adult learners have risen on the majority of

courses but not as significantly as those for learners aged 16 to 18. Overall success rates for adult learners remain well below corresponding national averages at all levels. For the low number of learners on work-based learning and Train to Gain programmes success rates have improved and are now close to the national averages. Success rates vary considerable between different courses and groups of learners. Data for 2010/11 shows a significant difference in success rates between learners aged 16 to 18 and adults, between male and female learners and between learners from different ethnicities.

How effective have the actions been to improve the quality of teaching and learning in construction?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, the college has improved the monitoring of teaching and learning in construction. Teaching staff have attended several training workshops and seminars covering topics, such as behaviour management, questioning techniques, lesson planning and teaching to meet individual learners' needs. College observation records show an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning with a higher proportion of lessons judged good or better and a lower proportion of inadequate lessons observed during 2010/11 compared with the previous year.

Observation records for the current academic year continue to show an improvement in the overall quality of teaching and learning. However, as reflected by observation records, and confirmed by lesson observations completed by inspectors during the monitoring visit, the quality of teaching and learning remains too variable with too few lessons being good or better. In too many lessons, especially in practical workshops, teachers do not plan sufficiently well to ensure that all learners make good progress. Opportunities are frequently missed to reinforce learning points, to give demonstrations or to further develop learners' knowledge and understanding to enable them to produce work of a higher standard.

What progress has the college made to improve the quality of leadership and management in construction?

Significant progress

Leadership and management were inadequate at the last inspection. Since then the college has invested significant resources to improve their effectiveness. A 'Task Force' has been established to build capacity and support the new construction management team in making the necessary improvements. Managers have completed training that has provided useful guidance and support in areas such as performance management and the use of data. Monitoring and evaluation of performance is much improved, with much more effective monitoring of learners' attendance, punctuality and progress. In-year attendance and retention rates are currently high.

Managers have reviewed the curriculum and appropriate new courses have been introduced at entry level that more effectively meet the needs and prior attainment

levels of learners. Targets have been introduced at course level and the roles and responsibilities of staff are now clearly defined. Staff and managers are much more effectively held to account for the performance of courses for which they are responsible. The detailed post-inspection action plan is reviewed frequently and communication between managers and staff is more effective. The 2010/11 self-assessment report, while identifying many strengths and areas for improvement accurately, is overgenerous in its grading of many aspects.

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