

South Leicestershire College

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

South Leicestershire College is a medium-sized further education college which is based in a new, purpose-built campus in South Wigston. The college also operates from a number of smaller sites, including a media centre in the centre of Leicester and an engineering training centre on the outskirts of the city. The College currently provides course in thirteen of the fifteen subject areas. In 2010/11 there were some 1,300 learners aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses and 366 following apprenticeships. Most of the more than 6,000 adult learners follow part-time courses, with two-thirds of these learners sponsored by their employers. Around 400 school pupils take a broad range of vocational programmes at the college.

The most recent inspection report was published in May 2010. The college was graded satisfactory in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management. Of the three subject areas inspected, preparation for life and work and business administration and law – learner responsive were graded good. Provision in business administration and law – employer responsive was judged satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in implementing quality assurance systems more effectively, so that managers can identify weaknesses at an early stage and take swift action to tackle them?

Reasonable progress

The new faculty structure introduced this year has clarified the responsibilities of managers and provided renewed impetus for improvement. There are encouraging signs that the observation of teaching and learning is become more consistent and more accurate, although the evaluation of teaching and learning still lacks clarity and does not always provide sufficient information to help managers within faculties to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Self-assessment now plays a pivotal role in college development and managers use the well-focused and extremely helpful weekly college-wide quality assurance activities well to instigate, or increase the pace of change. Learners speak highly of their increased involvement in the day-to-day running of the college but the arrangements for canvassing their opinions and communicating outcomes of actions taken as a result of their views have yet to receive sufficient priority within the college's quality assurance procedures.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving learners' outcomes since the last inspection?

Insufficient progress

The college has demonstrated its commitment to providing rigorous and self-critical self-assessment by judging that the outcomes for its learners are inadequate. During the period 2009 to 2011, success rates on long courses increased, but at a slower rate than that observed in similar colleges nationally. Success rates are below average for learners aged 16 to 18 and for adults on long courses as a result of both low retention and low achievement. However, the college's own data for current learners provide some indications of improvement, for example in the improved attendance and retention of learners on long courses. It is, though, too early to assess whether the impact of these changes will be sufficient to improve outcomes for learners on long courses to satisfactory levels. Success rates on short courses have improved significantly and are now above the national average. In employer responsive provision, success rates for apprentices and learners following the Train to Gain programme have also improved and are now close to the national average.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made with identifying progression pathways for learners and how effective have they been?

Significant progress

The college has placed a strong emphasis on refining its curriculum offer and providing a more coherent range of progression routes for learners. All faculties now provide appropriate courses at foundation to advanced level, and an appropriate range of higher level courses where there is an identified need. An interesting feature of curriculum development has been the introduction of a good range of entry level pre-employment courses in association with local employers and local authorities. All faculties have contributed to the development of these courses and the proportion of learners who attend them and subsequently find employment is good. Progression from local schools into college, and between courses at different levels within the college is also good, but few learners progress into higher education.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made with making teaching and learning observations more accurate?

Reasonable progress

In 2010/11, the college focused on developing the observation of teaching and learning as a key part of its quality assurance strategy. College data indicate that the quality of teaching and learning improved in that year, although the improvement

had little impact on learners' outcomes. The college's lesson observation team has since been extended to include heads of faculty, advanced teaching practitioners and programme area leaders. Staff have received appropriate training and their observations have been subjected to moderation both within and outside the college to provide greater consistency in their judgements. The views of learners are also canvassed after lesson observations; their views are sometimes less positive than those of the college's observers and do not always receive sufficient prominence within the college when determining the quality of teaching and learning. Observers are extremely skilled at identifying features of good teaching, but the progress that learners are making in lessons, particularly in relation to the development of their literacy and numeracy skills, are not always assessed in similar detail. Inspectors conducted a series of joint lesson observations with the college's lesson observation team and found that their assessment of the overall quality of lessons was largely accurate.

What progress has been made with improving the effectiveness of course reviews?

Reasonable progress

At the time of this visit, inspectors examined documents produced in the previous course review cycle for 2010/11. Many of these documents do not provide consistent judgements and sometimes give an over-optimistic assessment of course performance. Up until this year performance data in course reviews has not been presented in a form in which the achievements of different groups of learners could be analysed. The college's new course review format, based on the Common Inspection Framework (CIF), gives far greater prominence to the achievements of learners, particularly through the more self-critical use of performance data, so that course leaders can now identify the key strengths and areas for improvement which are most likely to lead to improved outcomes for learners. Course leaders report more confidently on learner satisfaction, equality of opportunity and teaching and learning targets and these views help to inform their course improvement plans.

How much progress has the college made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

The college has extended its arrangements for promoting equality and diversity. It has created a specific management role and introduced a new monitoring group which together aim to help the development of consistent equality and diversity practices and ensure that no groups of learners are disadvantaged. However, in 2010/11, the college paid insufficient attention to monitoring the performance of different groups of learners and was unable to prevent a few differences in achievement from increasing. In the current year, teachers and managers are using more accurate, timely and accessible management information to identify learners at risk of underperforming and are taking appropriate remedial action quickly. The college has continued to develop and extend its links with schools and community organisations to provide opportunities for groups under-represented in further

education, for example the establishment of a community venue in the centre of Leicester which provides courses for the local Somali population. Learner groups in the college make good use of the college's new accommodation to present regular displays and activities to promote diversity.

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