

Walford and North Shropshire 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

Walford and North Shropshire is a small general further education college with two main sites: a main campus in Oswestry and a second site at Baschurch specialising in land-based education and training. The majority of the college's learners come from Shropshire with a small proportion from neighbouring counties and Wales. The college offers courses in all subject areas except construction. Numbers of learners in several subject areas are small.

At the last full inspection of the college, in April 2010, overall effectiveness and all aspects of provision were judged to be satisfactory. Of the two subject areas inspected, one was judged to be good (animal and equine management) and the other satisfactory (leisure, travel and tourism). Safeguarding was judged to be inadequate and was reinspected in December 2010 and judged satisfactory. The college's residential accommodation for younger learners was inspected in March 2011 and graded as good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in increasing the effectiveness of quality assurance processes and the rigour of self-assessment, particularly at curriculum area level?	Reasonable progress
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Since the last inspection, the arrangements for moderation of self-assessment reports have been strengthened considerably. A validation panel, including external members, moderates each curriculum area report rigorously. Managers' helpful guidance to curriculum managers has developed their evaluative skills well and ensured they use data effectively. The instigation of four thorough and timely course reviews spaced over the academic year has resulted in prompt tackling of areas for improvement and created an increasingly self-critical culture. Review of the quality of teaching and learning as part of this process is underdeveloped and does not draw consistently on the useful evaluations that take place within teaching teams. The approach used for course reviews matches the self-assessment format, making the overall process coherent and constructive. In the curriculum self-assessment reports reviewed during the visit, a reasonable correlation was evident between the judgements and grades. The internal inspection process is well established, thorough and evaluates teaching and learning well. Action points generated are valid and helpful. However, although these processes are increasingly effective, outcomes and the quality of provision in several curriculum areas are not improving fast enough. In part this is due to staffing issues, but the difference in effectiveness between lower and higher performing subjects is, in several cases, marked. Quality assurance of written records of learners' progress is insufficient.

The quality assurance of adult and community learning provision has increased notably through the instigation of lesson observations of all teachers. As a result, managers are better informed of the effectiveness of provision and take actions for improvement as needed.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has been made in increasing success rates in college-based and employment-based provision? To what extent have underperforming subject areas been improved? Is the sharp focus on learners' safety being maintained? **Reasonable progress**

Success rates at most levels of study have increased since the last inspection, except for the few adults on GCE AS level courses. The long course success rate declined sharply in 2009/10 but increased significantly, particularly for younger learners, in 2010/11. Success rates are close to average at all levels except for adults on intermediate and advanced level courses whose rates are low and very low respectively, largely because these learners left their courses to enter employment. Success rates are very high on foundation level courses. GCE A-level success rates have increased and are above average. Success rates on GCE AS provision, however, are very low. Success rates in science and mathematics have declined during the last three years and are very low. Success rates on key and functional skills have increased notably and are high. Success rates at A* to C in GCSE English and mathematics declined in 2010/11 and are very low. Success rates on apprenticeships and other employment-based provision are below average, but success rates for current employment-based learners are higher than at the same time last year. Senior managers' actions to tackle remaining underperformance are mostly appropriate and determined. For example, changes in curriculum management and teaching teams in several subjects have been made and support provided.

Senior managers and governors have ensured that the sharp focus on learners' safety has been maintained. A nominated governor for safeguarding and learners' safety scrutinises the single central record rigorously and frequently. Teachers give a high priority to risk assessments for practical lessons.

Quality of provision

How well has teachers' practice in planning lessons improved? How much progress has been made in developing teachers' skills in making full use of opportunities to promote equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

Considerable work has been done to standardise the use of lesson plans and schemes of work to help and support teachers to plan effectively. Teachers are encouraged to consider a wide range of factors when planning their lessons; observers during lesson observations pay careful attention to evaluating the effectiveness of planning. During the inspection, inspectors observed some lessons that were very well planned and delivered but also observed several where planning was cursory and resulted in a less effective lesson. Teachers use detailed profiles of learners well to guide their choice of specific strategies to match learners' needs and abilities in most cases.

Training to develop teachers' understanding of equality and diversity and how it can be promoted through the curriculum is thorough and ongoing. A comprehensive set of equality and diversity criteria is used well as a basis for training and to support teachers' promotion in lessons. Managers undertake audits of schemes of work to ensure that coverage is complete and themes are developed in appropriate places in the curriculum. The extent to which opportunities to maximise the impact of themes related to cultural diversity is inconsistent as some curriculum areas are further ahead than others in ensuring teachers use these opportunities to the full.

How much progress has been made in taking successful actions to embed arrangements for teaching of functional skills across all subjects? How well is learners' progress in achieving functional skills monitored?

Significant progress

The functional skills policy has been revised and is comprehensive. Functional skills teachers and vocational teachers work closely and well together to deliver the curriculum and jointly teach lessons. This has increased the relevance to learners of mathematics and English in specialist subjects considerably. Plans to develop this approach further by strengthening the joint role are in hand. Results for functional skills have improved markedly. Attendance at lessons has increased.

Initial and diagnostic testing informs the level of functional skill study very effectively. Detailed information is available for teachers based on learners' initial assessment and includes a profile of their attitudes to learning. Most classes contain a wide range of abilities with learners working at different levels; this mostly works well because teachers are skilled at devising relevant activities and using questions and other approaches that are well matched to learners' ability. They show considerable determination and creativity in supporting learners to tackle activities that are often challenging. Occasionally, they help learners too much. Learning

resources are mostly of good quality, well-structured and available on the college's virtual learning environment.

How much progress has been made in developing the use of individual learning plans and target setting for learners? **Reasonable progress**

The use of individual learning plans (ILP) and the quality of target setting for learners have improved since the last inspection. The ILP process raises the awareness of the personal tutor and other teachers of a learner at risk, taking account of attitude, attendance and punctuality. The ILP process holds learners to account and encourages them to take responsibility for their own progress. The quality and effectiveness of ILPs and target setting are mixed. In the best cases, ILPs are completed fully and contain a good analysis of learners' strengths and weaknesses along with a risk assessment related to their performance. Individual targets are constructive and provide very helpful and personalised advice and guidance. In the less effective examples, targets are very general, too operational and are identical for each learner on the same course. The quality assurance of ILPs and target setting is insufficient, but managers monitor the quality of reports to parents closely. Many learners benefit considerably from viewing and analysing their record of assessed work which can be motivational, but not all learners use this facility. Attendance is improving, suggesting that the closer attention to attendance monitoring through the ILP process is effective. Current learners' retention rates show signs of improvement, based on college data, indicating that the focus on identifying and supporting learners at risk may be proving effective.

Leadership and management

How much progress has been made in improving strategic planning including the evaluation of strategic options and short and longer term planning? **Significant progress**

The outcomes of the last inspection regarding strategic plans and financial management had a major impact on senior managers and governors. They established a working party to reconsider the position of the college, its viability, purpose and the possibilities for its future. This group rightly involved staff at all levels and included external partners' perceptions to inform the strategic plan, which contains very appropriate and challenging short- and long-term targets. It is too early to judge the impact of the plan on learners' outcomes, but attendance, retention and applications are higher than at the same time last year. Some areas of the college have improved; other areas have proved more difficult to change and to improve. Managers have made significant improvements to financial management and health, and have ensured increased financial reserves. The self-assessed judgements for financial health and control have increased from satisfactory and inadequate respectively several years ago to good in 2012. Managers have ensured investment in new buildings and refurbishments which has substantially improved accommodation and resources for learners and staff. Curriculum managers are now

more aware of financial matters and welcome the principal's termly presentations on strategy and finances. Their use of strategic targets in course reviews and subject area self-assessment reports is underdeveloped.

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