

Weymouth College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Weymouth College is a medium-sized general further education college. The main campus is near the centre of Weymouth, with community centres in Weymouth and Dorchester. Approximately 4,500 learners are enrolled at the college. Learners study courses in 13 subject areas, and apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. Courses range from entry level to advanced and foundation degree level. Just over 1,600 students are aged 16 to 18 and 2,600 are adults. Most adults study part-time courses. A further 228 school pupils aged 14 to 16 and 850 work-based learners attend the college. Around 6% of the population of Dorset come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion in Weymouth is very similar to the 3% of the student body that come from minority ethnic heritages.

Overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management were all judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Four subject areas were judged to be good, but the information and communication technology subject area was inadequate.

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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A detailed analysis of the causes of underperforming courses has been undertaken by managers since the last inspection. Actions taken to bring about improvements include making the moderation of the records of lesson observations and action plans more robust. A new, wide-ranging electronic system for tracking student performance and progress towards completing qualifications is now in use across the college. It enables staff to monitor closely students' attendance, retention, punctuality and progress in completing qualifications at unit and sub-unit level. Key performance indicators are now cascaded from senior managers to course teams and individual teachers. Responsibility and accountability for the appropriate achievement of key performance indicators are attributable at all levels. Regular meetings held between programme managers and senior managers now focus strongly on monitoring progress against key performance indicators and the experience of the learner.

The college now has a more realistic view of the quality of lessons, but curriculum managers do not routinely consider whether there is a realistic relationship between lesson observation grade profiles and success rates. Feedback to students during progress reviews, and targets set for improvements are not sufficiently developmental and personalised.

Outcomes for learners

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

Reasonable progress

The retention rate for adult learners on long courses has improved well this year, from below average last year to slightly above average. The retention rate for students of all ages on long courses has improved and is above average. More adults have remained in learning this year in most subject areas, but retention has declined to well below average in two areas. Learners receiving additional learning support (ALS) at intermediate and advanced levels now have the same retention rates as their peers, which were lower last year. The current retention rate for learners receiving ALS at foundation level is slightly lower than for learners not receiving it; however, it was much higher last year. The average attendance rate for students receiving ALS has improved well to above the average for the college this year. Learning mentors have a stronger focus on students studying at intermediate and advanced levels and are monitoring their progress more rigorously. The average college attendance rate has improved and is satisfactory. The recommendation made by the previous inspection for the college to improve links with employers to give more students opportunities for vocationally relevant experience, has not been met.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in strengthening the monitoring of teaching and learning and actions for improvement?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the college's lesson observation records focused too heavily on teaching and not enough emphasis was given to learning. New measures to strengthen teaching and learning, including using external consultants to build teachers' abilities, are beginning to develop better practice. All recent observation records have been moderated. Managers now ensure greater rigour in improving weaker practice by taking a risk-based approach to observing lessons. Teachers of weaker or satisfactory lessons are now observed more frequently. Many lesson observation records evaluate clearly students' learning and activities. Action plans to improve weaker aspects of lessons are not always sufficiently comprehensive. They sometimes omit important aspects which affect learning. Key aspects, such as ensuring that individual learning needs are met and the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons, are not always commented upon. Some lessons are graded too generously. Work-based learning, although observed as part of internal verification, is not included in the formal observation system.

Mentoring, workshops and support for developing teachers' skills, including the integration of information and learning technology into lessons, are helping to improve teachers' skills.

Leadership and management

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

Training about ensuring respect and challenging inappropriate behaviour has been attended by all staff since the last inspection. Training on the different equality strands has started to be rolled out to staff and more sessions are planned to take place this year. Equality and diversity are intended to be woven into lessons more frequently at the start of the next academic year and some updates to schemes of work has taken place. There are plans for teachers to be assisted in this activity by the recently-appointed equality champions. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively in too few lessons. The lesson observation scheme highlights very few lessons where good practice in equality and diversity has been observed. Teachers are not sufficiently aware of which subject areas have good practice in promoting equality and diversity in lessons or that it was an area for development identified at the last inspection. There is too little sharing of good practice in the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons.

What progress has been made in improving provision in information and communication technology (ICT), which was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection? **Insufficient progress**

Conditions for the dwindling number of ICT students have deteriorated further. None of the recommendations from the last inspection have been implemented successfully. The proportion of learners remaining on course at intermediate level is low. For the second year running, the BTEC national diploma course has an expected success rate of 100%. The college plans to discontinue the national diploma course, although interest in it was shown by prospective learners during open days. The college provides no opportunities in ICT for learners to progress beyond the intermediate level. Most intermediate level learners progress to business or media courses at advanced level because of considerable difficulties in travelling to other providers of ICT. Key staff with technical expertise in ICT have left the college. Managers provide little support or technical leadership to the remaining teachers. Part-time courses are successful, but they are managed separately, and there is no exchange of ideas between teaching teams. Initiatives to increase students' exposure to industry have foundered. Planned educational visits did not take place. The college has not explored potential employment-based opportunities for students to develop practical experience well enough. Placements in the voluntary sector, schools and public bodies have not been properly explored.

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