

Kirklees College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130537

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Last day of inspection: 14 December 2011

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Kirklees College has two main campuses located in the centres of Huddersfield and Dewsbury. A new building will open in September 2012 to replace the existing Huddersfield site. Although the district has areas of relative affluence, it also has areas of significant deprivation. More than half of the college's students are from disadvantaged postcodes. Kirklees is a multicultural borough and the ethnic mix of the student cohort is broad. The college has a higher proportion of female than male students. Most enrolments are at foundation level, with around a third at intermediate level and about 20% at advanced level or above. In 2010/11, over 500 learners followed apprenticeship programmes. A new Principal took up his post at the beginning of June 2011.

The college was inspected in April 2011 and judged to be inadequate. Outcomes for students, leadership and management, and equality and diversity were inadequate. Capacity to improve, quality of provision and safeguarding were satisfactory. Of the six subject areas inspected, two were inadequate and four were satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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

Significant progress

Since the last inspection, the college has greatly strengthened its approach to self-assessment and quality improvement. There is far greater consistency in the application of quality-improvement processes by departmental managers. Training for curriculum team leaders in the use of data has improved to inform areas for further improvement, as well as identify strengths, more effectively. Many under-performing courses have been closed; others have undergone significant redesign. Performance management systems have improved. Curriculum teams meet monthly with heads of department to report on the progress of learners. These meetings lead to more timely identification of students' slow progress and prompt interventions to improve performance. Quality-improvement plans are better focused on the impact provision has on learners. Learners' views are canvassed extensively and are used more widely to inform the self-assessment process. For example, student feedback on assignments has led to improvements in the organisation of assessment this year. According to college data, there was a substantial increase in success rates in 2010/11. Governance arrangements have been strengthened with the appointment

of additional governors. This has led to increased rigour in the monitoring of the college's performance.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving students' outcomes and in particular have retention rates improved and have the achievement gaps between different groups of learners begun to close?

Significant progress

According to college data, success rates improved in 2010/11 by 12 percentage points, to exceed the previous year's national averages. Success rates rose at all levels, but most markedly on foundation and intermediate programmes. College data indicate significant improvement to achievement rates for students of all ages and at all levels, to reach an overall achievement rate which is high in comparison with similar further education colleges. The overall retention rate has improved by five percentage points, most markedly at foundation level. Current retention rates have improved in comparison with this time last year. Although retention rates on long courses at advanced level have improved, the college has correctly identified that this remains a priority for further improvement.

The college identified improvement to success rates across 15 subject areas last year. Success rates of apprentices remain broadly in line with the national average, although the proportion that completed work-based learning programmes within the appropriate timescale dipped last year. The college analysis of 2010/11 data by different groups indicates that gaps in achievement are closing in almost all cases, although the college recognises that more work could be done, in particular with male learners.

What progress has been made in improving outcomes in sport, travel and tourism, which was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

About two-thirds of students study sports and leisure subjects and a third travel and tourism. The majority of students study at foundation or intermediate level. According to college data, overall success rates on sport and leisure courses rose significantly, to well above the previous year's national average. This is reflected in significant improvement to achievement and retention rates for all students at all levels. On travel and tourism courses, the increase in the overall success rate was not as great, but still rose to exceed the previous year's national average. The most significant improvements in travel and tourism were on long foundation and intermediate courses. On advanced courses, however, success rates remained broadly static and retention rates fell by five percentage points.

The college recognised that significant improvement was necessary in this area and reorganised its management last summer. Two new managers have taken up post.

An analysis of the curriculum offer took place and some underperforming courses were removed. There is more focus on the progress made by learners judged to be at risk. College tracking data indicate that, so far this year, progress has improved and retention rates are higher.

What progress has been made in improving outcomes in arts, media and publishing, which was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection? **Reasonable progress**

College data show a 9% increase in success rates in creative arts in 2010/11, bringing them close to the national average. Retention rates improved on many programmes. However, this was not consistent. Rates were particularly low on performing arts courses at both foundation and advanced level. Action taken to address the weaker areas includes changes to management within the curriculum area, course redesign and a stronger focus on improving teaching and learning. Data for the current year show an increased retention rate on the majority of courses, when measured against the same month last year. There is a history of poor retention in the first year of some national diploma courses, but students in the current first year are enjoying learning and more are staying on. The tracking of learners' progress is much improved and learners are clearer about their targets. They receive regular feedback on assignments and helpful guidance on what they need to do to improve further. Student feedback shows improved levels of satisfaction with their courses this year.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in supporting teachers to develop stimulating and challenging lessons and to ensure that teaching has a demonstrable impact on students' progress? **Reasonable progress**

Much work has taken place since the previous inspection to improve the college's monitoring of teaching and learning. The college observation team is large and additional training for observers to standardise their judgements and moderate their findings has taken place. Observation records indicate that there is greater emphasis placed upon the progress being made by learners in the lessons. However, in a few observation records, there is still too much emphasis placed upon teaching technique rather than the quality of learning. Staff receive detailed feedback after observations. A college priority this year is to reduce the proportion of lessons graded satisfactory. College data show an improvement this year. The college has made some progress in ensuring that lessons on advanced level courses are sufficiently challenging, but recognises that this is still an area for further development. Staff can informally observe each other's lessons to spread good practice; pilot work is taking place to formalise and extend peer observations. Work is taking place to map skill levels of staff in the use of information technology to support learning, and further staff development in this area is planned.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving employer engagement?

Reasonable progress

The college has reviewed and revised its employer engagement strategy. It has also reviewed the quality-assurance processes used in its business development unit. A new vision of 'enterprise culture' has been introduced across the college to improve the development of schemes of work. Increased use of work-related activities is being encouraged across all departments. More vocationally based enrichment activities have been introduced. In particular, the college has strong links with local sports organisations. It is planned to set up individual employer focus groups across each vocational area. The Principal has taken a proactive role in trying to engage more employers with the work of the college and this work is beginning to bear fruit. However, it is too early to see much of the impact of this work on improving outcomes, although there has been a rise in the number of apprentices in catering, hairdressing and business. Some courses have been redesigned as a result of employer feedback. The most recent college employer survey shows high rates of satisfaction. Very few employers returned the online questionnaire from inspectors. Those who did, or met with inspectors, indicated that they were generally satisfied by the work of the college.

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