

Macclesfield College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Macclesfield College is a medium-sized general further education college located in East Cheshire. It is situated in a 'Learning Zone' campus alongside an 11 to 16 academy that it sponsors, and a special school. The college offers courses across 13 subject areas and from entry level to higher education. Employer-based provision has grown significantly over the last few years. In 2011/12 the college enrolled around 3,150 learners. The majority of full-time learners are aged 16 to 18 and most part-time learners are adults.

The college was last inspected in February 2012. At that inspection the college was judged to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, leadership and management, and safeguarding. Outcomes for learners and quality of provision were judged to be satisfactory. Provision in the four subject areas inspected was judged to be satisfactory in three and inadequate in arts, media and publishing.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit, which include the three mandatory themes of self-assessment and improvement planning, outcomes for learners, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in the analysis and evaluation of data and other information to ensure more rigorous and accurate self-assessment?

Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection, the college's self-assessment and quality-assurance processes failed to secure consistent improvements in outcomes for students. Many of the grades awarded and judgements made were highly inflated. Senior managers have taken effective action to streamline the self-assessment process. It is now more inclusive, focused on improving outcomes for students and enabling the college to achieve its strategic aims. Data are now more accurate, widely available and used routinely by staff at all levels to set and monitor key performance targets.

Staff at course level welcome their involvement in drafting their own curriculum reviews. A new team of curriculum leaders is rising to the challenge of the new arrangements for more rigorous validation of departmental self-assessment reports. Judgements in the draft self-assessment report for 2011/12 appear to be more realistic. However, although more honest in assessing weaknesses, the college is aware that stated strengths in a few areas reflect sector norms rather than examples of best practice.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving the success rates and outcomes for learners aged 16 to 18? Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection, improving success rates for students aged 16 to 18 was identified as a key area for improvement. The college has put in place a wide range of strategies to improve performance which are already having an impact. The results for summer 2012 show that the long-course success rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved at all levels; at foundation level by five percentage points, at intermediate level by four percentage points and at advanced level, where there are most students, by ten percentage points. There have also been marked increases in the percentages of students moving from the first year to the second year of a two-year course in all areas. In addition, there are significant improvements in retention when comparing October 2011 to October 2012. For example, in engineering retention has increased from 83% to 100%.

The college is aware, however, that the success rate at advanced level is still not high enough. This is partly due to the second year of poorly performing courses that the college is now no longer offering. There are also other pockets of weaker performance. To address these issues the college has continued to further develop improvement strategies. The curriculum has been comprehensively overhauled and is now much more closely aligned to students' aspirations, the middle-management level has been restructured, the use of data is much improved and there is an enhanced focus on teaching and learning.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has been made in eradicating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in relation to teachers' use of questioning techniques and assessment practice? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection teaching, training and learning were judged to be satisfactory but there was significant variation across the college. The college has successfully prioritised the need to ensure high-quality teaching across all subjects. Evidence presented to inspectors supports the college's view that strategies are beginning to have an impact on raising students' aspirations and eliminating inconsistencies. A revised system for the observation of teaching and learning was implemented at the beginning of September 2012. Unannounced observations carried out by a team of trained observers began in the first week of the term and now cover full- and part-time teaching staff. A team of senior managers moderates graded observations more routinely than before and with increasing rigour. Learning coaches and advanced practitioners provide effective support and mentoring for teachers whose lessons are judged as requiring improvement or inadequate. Almost all teachers improve their grades at re-observation.

Peer observations, team meetings and whole-college training events are used effectively to spread good practice. For example, weaknesses in assessment were successfully tackled at a recent event. This has resulted in teachers being more aware of and using a comprehensive range of strategies, including peer assessment, to check students' understanding and extend their learning.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring robust implementation of safeguarding policies and that governors are provided with the information they need for effective monitoring?

Reasonable progress

Comprehensive processes have been put in place to improve the robust implementation of safeguarding policies. A strategic group has been set up, with its membership including a governor and curriculum link, to support effective dissemination of information throughout the college. Reports are now regularly sent to the governors on a termly basis and cover a fixed set of appropriate criteria. Paperwork has been developed, such as the anti-bullying and harassment flowchart, to make sure all staff know the exact processes to follow and that outcomes are properly evidenced, with feedback passed on to all those involved.

An online central bullying register (CBR) has been set up so the progress in following up any incident is clear and an overview of what is going on can be seen. Further developments to the CBR are planned to ensure every aspect of the process is fully recorded in one place and that the monitoring of cases is consistent across different areas. A detailed audit of safeguarding has been carried out which has fed into the development of a comprehensive action plan. This covers a range of aspects and includes a stronger role for student input into future developments. While a great deal of development has taken place in this area, it is too early to see its full impact.

What arrangements have been made in improving performance management to ensure better alignment with college priorities and increase staff accountability?

Reasonable progress

A new quality manager, with the assistance of an external consultant and other college staff, has reviewed many of the college's quality processes to provide a sharper focus on students and greater coherence with college objectives. One aspect of this review has been an overhaul of the performance management system. This is now linked more closely with the outcomes of lesson observations which are being used increasingly to inform further training for individual staff. Teachers are being set individual actions and targets after their lesson observation and these are reviewed routinely at performance review meetings. However, the college is aware that actions need to be more tightly focused on helping students to learn and make progress. Teaching staff are also set precise targets for retention, achievement and attendance linked closely to strategic priorities. Most staff welcome the strengthening

of the performance management system that now includes the opportunity for performance-related pay. It is too soon to assess the full impact of the new arrangements but early indications are that levels of motivation among staff are high and that this is leading to greater expectations for students.

What progress has been made in developing provision in arts, media and publishing so that the needs of students are met and success rates improve?

Significant progress

Staff in this department have made major changes which are already benefiting students significantly. The curriculum has been completely revised and the management structure has been changed. There have been major developments in student facilities, for example building rehearsal rooms for music students, and assessment practices have been adapted to improve students' feedback and their understanding of assessment criteria.

Success rates for students aged 16 to 18 and over 19 increased markedly in the summer. Retention rates from the first year to the second year of a two-year course have increased from 38% in September 2011 to 91% in September 2012. Responses from the student induction survey show much higher levels of satisfaction when comparing the results from September 2011 to September 2012. For example, on one course the proportion of students that strongly agree they understand the purpose of diagnostic assessment has more than doubled to nearly 90% and on another course those that strongly agree they are on the correct course has increased from just half the students to all of them. Current retention in the area is now high at 96%, whereas for the same period last year it was 78%.

The students with whom inspectors talked on the monitoring visit are enjoying their studies. They feel that the course they are on is supporting them in developing the skills they need to move on to the next step. Within the lessons observed, students are motivated and enthusiastic and can clearly explain what they are doing and how they are developing their understanding.

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