

Franklin College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Franklin College is a medium-sized sixth-form college situated in Grimsby. The college draws learners from a wide geographical area covering north Lincolnshire. Within the college's catchment area there is an outward migration of young people aged 19 and above and a shortage of high-level skills. Most employment opportunities are in low-skilled work and the average gross wage is low. The area is one of considerable contrast, with some districts in the region experiencing the least deprivation and others among the most 10% deprived nationally. The proportion of school leavers achieving grades A* to C at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was 54.8% in 2011/12.

The most recent inspection report was published in February 2012. The college's overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, and leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Teaching, learning and assessment were judged to be requiring improvement, as were all four curriculum areas inspected.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the rigour of self-assessment and the use of data to identify underperformance?

Reasonable progress

Data are now collected centrally and are easily accessible to staff at all levels throughout the organisation. The electronic system is continually being revised to meet the needs of teachers and managers in monitoring provision at individual student, course and whole-college level. A new management structure has improved the lines of communication and there is a much stronger emphasis on accountability for student performance and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report follows the new inspection framework and there is detailed analysis of data in the whole college and subject reports. In a few instances, the headline data used in the report mask weaknesses. This means that areas for improvement, such as achievement on intermediate-level courses, are not always identified clearly or quickly enough for actions to be taken.

All staff are involved in self-assessment and there is greater ownership at course level. Curriculum areas are now monitoring their progress against the action plans more closely at regular team meetings. In most subject self-assessment reports there are clear reasons for the grades awarded. While there is now more consistency in the judgements made in the self-assessment report, in a few places there appears

to be some differences in the weighting given to the different aspects of students' outcomes.

How much progress has the college made in the setting and monitoring of specific, measurable and challenging targets for improvement?

Significant progress

The college has set clear targets at whole-college level and these link closely to those set at departmental, subject and individual teacher level. The college's targets are comprehensive and appropriately challenging. Progress towards achieving targets is monitored closely at all levels throughout the college. In a few subject-area action plans the targets are not always specific or measurable to ensure that the impact of the actions taken can be evaluated fully.

Targets at student level are clear and reviewed regularly, particularly during the induction phase, to ensure that students are placed on the correct course and at the correct level. In addition to minimum target grades that students agree with their teacher, personal targets for improvement are based on the assessment feedback from their work. The new system has led to further improvements in retention so far this academic year but it is too soon to judge its full impact, particularly on the key priority of raising the proportion of students who achieve high grades.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates for all students?

Significant progress

The college's overall success rate increased markedly in 2011/12 by seven percentage points and is now in line with the national average for similar colleges. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18, an area for improvement at the previous inspection, increased to 94%. There was a simultaneous but smaller increase in achievement. The revised entry criteria and enrolment process, alongside an enhanced induction period with closer monitoring of students' progress, has led to further improvements in retention since September 2012.

Overall A-level success rates improved to 96% and at AS level they improved to 79%. Variations in performance across different subjects have reduced and in several areas students' achievements are now particularly good. However, some poor performance remains at individual subject level, particularly in science and psychology. The proportion of students progressing from the first year of an advanced-level programme to the second year improved in September 2012. The college keeps good records of students' destinations, including those who leave before completing the second year of their advanced-level programme.

Attendance is monitored very closely and this has led to significant improvements; it is currently 92% since September 2012. Students who are 'at-risk' of leaving college

or struggling to keep up with their work are now identified very quickly and given a mentor to provide extra support and closer monitoring.

What progress has been made in improving the percentage of students achieving high grades?

Insufficient progress

In 2011/12 the proportion of students achieving high grades improved slightly at both AS and A level but both remain significantly below the national average for similar colleges. The college has correctly identified those subjects where performance is weak and the action plans indicate the strategies that will be used to raise the proportion of high grades on these courses, but it is too soon to judge the impact. The college has set clear targets, expectations and actions for individual staff and at whole-college level to raise the proportion of high grades in 2012/13.

At intermediate level the overall success rate has improved although the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C on their GCSE course declined in 2011/12. This was mainly due to a fall in the number of students gaining high grade passes in English. The percentage of students achieving high grades in GCSE mathematics and science is high.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has been made in embedding the lesson observation system and in ensuring that the outcomes of observations inform actions for improvement?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, the quality of teaching and learning across the college varied too much both within and between subjects. The college has acted swiftly to remedy this and has given the highest priority to raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Much has been accomplished in a relatively short space of time, especially against a background of a recent major staffing restructure at senior and middle level.

Arrangements for observation have been revised and strengthened. A small team of senior managers now observes lessons. Teachers are re-observed after focused support and development if their lessons were judged as requiring improvement or inadequate. The recording of lesson observations is mostly thorough and grades are realistic, although a few observers focus too much on the teaching activities rather than on students' learning and progress. The link between the outcome of individual lesson observations and performance management is now clear and robust.

The new observation system has given managers a more realistic picture of the quality of teaching and learning. The college has noted an improvement in the proportion of good or better lessons and the impact of this is evident in the improvements in students' success in 2011/12. College surveys also indicate that many more students than previously are satisfied or very satisfied with their lessons.

However, the college is not complacent and recognises that still more needs to be done to eliminate the remaining weaknesses and inconsistencies in classroom practice.

What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for sharing good practice?

Reasonable progress

In the previous inspection, the sharing of good practice was not widespread, and weaknesses in the planning of lessons to ensure the development of students' oracy, literacy and numeracy skills, and the promotion of equality and diversity were identified. Reasonable progress has been made to share good practice and to eradicate weaknesses. All staff training events since the inspection have focused on teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers speak enthusiastically of the many opportunities they now have to learn from each other and are especially proud when asked to showcase their own good practice. A new team of enthusiastic teaching and learning coaches has responded quickly in providing support to help individual teachers to improve, but also in disseminating good practice across the college and among their designated 'learning communities'.

Teachers are becoming more self-reflective and are working hard to improve their practice. For example, a strong focus on improving assessment of students' learning is evident in lessons and many teachers pay good attention to developing students' literacy skills and encouraging the use of specialist terminology. More subjects are making increasingly effective use of feedback sheets for marked work. However, the initiatives to share good practice are relatively recent, and although having a positive impact in increasing the proportion of good and better teaching, more needs to be done to embed the good and very good practice that exists in many subjects. For example, greater consideration needs to be given to the promotion of equality and diversity and the use of extension activities to support learning further. Teachers still need to give more attention to the full range of students' abilities when planning lessons so that all students, especially the more able, feel challenged to do their best and extend their learning. Further work is needed to ensure consistently good practice in assessing students' learning and progress during lessons.

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