

South Worcestershire College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130709

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Last day of inspection: 19 June 2013

Type of provider: General further education college

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RE-INSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

South Worcestershire College is a small general further education college serving the south of the county of Worcestershire. The two main campuses are both located close to their respective town centres in Evesham and Malvern. The six secondary schools in the local area all have sixth forms and five further education providers are located within a 20 mile radius of the college.

The area served by the college has no significant levels of deprivation and levels of unemployment are below those nationally. The proportion of students who achieve five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics in the local area is close to the national average. The proportion of the local population from minority ethnic groups is lower than average.

The college's most recent inspection was in October 2012. The college's overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, and leadership and management were inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment required improvement. Of the five subject areas inspected, three required improvement and two were inadequate.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit all of which were areas for improvement at the last inspection.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in ensuring that governors understand information on academic performance and set challenging targets to drive improvement?	Reasonable progress
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The governors have responded positively to the previous inspection and have taken decisive action to bring about improvements in the college. They now have a clearer understanding of the performance of each academy and where underperformance exists. The college has rightly changed the reporting structure for performance and clarified accountability for student and course performance. The standards committee of the governing body now receives detailed monthly reports from each Academy and monitors performance across a range of relevant criteria including attendance, retention, learners at risk and progress in addressing concerns identified during the previous inspection. These detailed reports are informative and honest and reflect the college's position well. Governors are more confident, and better informed, to challenge performance and this is reflected in the questions they ask of senior managers. Link governors for each academy now visit their allotted academy each term to talk to students, staff and managers and to review performance. Their

findings are reported back to the governing body. However, governors and managers recognise that the process of agreeing targets for the college does not take sufficient account of performance data or national benchmarks.

What progress has the college made in monitoring performance against targets and robustly holding managers and staff to account for underperformance? **Reasonable progress**

Prior to the previous inspection leaders and managers did not use performance management information effectively to drive improvement. Since then the college has changed the reporting structure and clarified responsibility and accountability for performance. Heads of academies report to the Vice Principal of Learning and Performance and are directly responsible for the quality of provision and performance of courses in their area. They have an improved understanding of the performance of their staff and courses through improved use of data, are more confident in challenging staff over their performance and, where necessary, in invoking capability procedures. They have agreed targets for retention, achievement and attendance for each course and monitor these closely. Monthly course audits and reports to the governing body ensure that any underperformance is clearly identified and that managers have appropriate actions in place to bring about improvement. However, targets have not been agreed for high grade achievement or progression at course level and there remain a high number of underperforming courses.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in setting challenging targets for students based on the results of initial assessment, prior attainment and previous experience to improve success rates? **Reasonable progress**

The college has made reasonable progress in setting challenging targets for students. Those students spoken to were aware of their individual targets and how well they were progressing, and spoke positively about being challenged to work harder and achieve higher grades. This was particularly so for those on courses with simple pass/fail criteria where the college had introduced its own grading system to motivate students to achieve higher. The use of short and medium term targets was developing well in some subjects but in others too many targets were based on completing tasks rather than the attainment of knowledge and skills. Most students were making appropriate progress towards their targeted level of achievement and as a result the college's predicted success rate for students on long courses is in line with its target of 85%, an improvement on last year of 6.5 percentage points. The predicted high grade achievement for students is markedly higher than last year and around the national average for similar colleges. However, success rates for the small number of apprentices have declined significantly this year from the high rate achieved in the past three years.

What progress has been made in monitoring students' learning and progress against their individual targets?**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection staff did not robustly monitor student progress and did not make effective use of the system to identify and support students at risk of not completing their course. Staff accountability for the success of their students is now much clearer. They carefully monitor students' progress towards their individual targets and are able to predict with some confidence the number of students likely to be successful. The introduction of an online process to monitor and record students' achievement is proving particularly effective in enabling students to be more ambitious in what they can achieve and to take more responsibility for their learning. The students spoken to were aware of the progress they were making and exactly what they needed to do to complete their course. Staff rigorously apply the colleges' system to identify and support students at risk of leaving early or not completing. In many cases the support provided has resulted in students being retained on their course and continuing to work towards a successful outcome. Student retention has improved and is in line with the college target of 91.5%. Attendance has also improved and is also in line with the college target of 88%.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**What progress has been made in improving the proportion of good and outstanding teaching?****Reasonable progress**

The college has implemented a wide range of staff training and development to help improve teaching and learning, including sessions on assessment. Teachers are more aware of the importance of promoting equality and diversity and English, mathematics and functional skills through their planning of lessons. Good practice in these areas, however, has yet to be widespread across all departments. In a small number of lessons, the promotion of equality and diversity is poor. Managers have recently undertaken a standardisation of lesson observations resulting in a lower profile of good and better lessons than the previous year. An increased focus on learning in lessons during observation has provided the college with a more realistic and clearer foundation for improvement. Senior managers have strengthened the college's moderation procedures for observations and restructured the observation team to provide a greater degree of objectivity in determining the quality of lessons.

Managers recognise that the observation process, targeted individual staff training and performance appraisal processes all require strengthening further for September 2013, and have firm plans in place to do so. It is too early, however, to determine the full impact of these recent and planned changes.

What progress has been made in planning and delivering lessons that meet the needs of all students?**Reasonable progress**

Teachers are making increasingly good use of assessment information to plan lessons. In the more effective lessons, teachers use detailed assessment information

about individual students to carefully plan learning. For example, in one lesson a teacher identified which students would benefit from leading a group discussion activity in order to increase their participation in the session. Not all teachers however, use assessment information as well as they could do to plan activities that will extend students' progress and accelerate the pace of learning. Managers are aware that not all observers provide sufficiently focussed or detailed feedback to teachers following observation and that teachers who receive comprehensive feedback are much better placed to improve their teaching practice. Students spoken to during the monitoring visit reported much better organisation of assessment this year. The majority of schemes of work sampled by inspectors during the monitoring visit showed clear planning of assessment through the year. Some initiatives introduced this year, such as the appointment of teaching and learning coaches, have proved effective in supporting individual staff to improve their practice. Managers now undertake themed learning walks and desk-based audits, to check frequently on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers have yet to evaluate formally the findings of these so they can systematically share good practice and/or use these learning walks to review the full impact of initiatives and actions taken to improve.

What progress has been made in improving the quality of provision in sport and public services judged inadequate at the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

College data suggests the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in sport and public services is improving steadily. Managers have increased the frequency in which they monitor the performance within sport and public services, including regular reviews of the number of students on schedule to complete their programmes and student attendance. College in-year data show a notable rise in the proportion of students expected to complete their courses compared to the same point last year, particularly those on sports courses, which have risen from 76% to 95%. Student attendance across both sport and public services however, has fallen slightly compared to the previous year. The proportion of learners progressing to further and higher education has also increased this year. Additionally, the proportion of learners currently on schedule to achieve higher grades is much greater than in the previous year, rising from 4% to 22%, with equal rises across both areas. Teachers' planning of lessons, however, still requires further improvement in order to increase the pace and depth of learning. The use of the college's virtual learning environment to support learning inside and outside of lessons remains underdeveloped.

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