

Hillcroft College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Hillcroft College is a charity based in Surbiton, South West London. It is a small residential college for women aged over 19 years. Courses are generally very short and last for a few days, or short, lasting several weeks. For a small number of learners on the GCSE, pre-access or access to higher education courses, the duration is much longer, from two terms to an academic year. The college attracts learners from across England. It has 50 bedrooms and an on-site nursery. Many learners are unemployed when they join the college, have been out of learning for some time, or have experienced disruptions in their education through, for example, ill health. Many have few qualifications when they join and receive financial support to attend.

At the college's previous inspection, in December 2012, overall effectiveness and outcomes for learners were both judged as inadequate. Teaching, learning and assessment and leadership and management were judged to require improvement. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in implementing a data system that enables managers and tutors to monitor trends in retention, achievement, success and attendance rates and the impact of quality improvement initiatives?

Significant progress

Significant progress has been made in providing managers and teaching staff with accurate and accessible retention, achievement and success data. Through the post-inspection action plan, the college monitors improvements to data collection and analysis with clear and carefully scheduled targets. Managers and tutors have received training in using the individual learner record live-link data and on management information reporting systems. A new data and quality working group is identifying and organising the production of relevant data for use in course reviews and the overall college self-assessment report.

Course leaders and curriculum leads have a good understanding of ways to access and utilise data, and communications between staff responsible for management information and curriculum staff are significantly improved. The college plans to introduce a new register system from September 2013, which will allow improved access to attendance data, but it is too early to make a judgement on its effectiveness.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the college made in developing effective systems to identify why some groups achieve less well? What actions have been set to improve the retention and achievement rates of these groups? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, success rates by different groups of learners were too mixed across the college and learners identified as needing additional learning support or with a disability were more successful than others. Success rates for Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani learners were low, and declining, and the minority of learners aged below 20 years or over 60 years had lower achievement rates.

The establishment of well-developed systems to capture the achievements of different groups of learners is effective. Data are broken down by age, ethnicity, disability, learning difficulty and by additional learning support. In addition, the identification of differing course levels is highlighted. These reports are comprehensive and the information presented has a helpful narrative that clearly directs the reader to concerns or anomalies that invite further investigation and/or intervention. A useful trend analysis is produced to enable an 'at a glance view' of, for example, trends by age group. This information is accessible to tutors who can readily view a class or cohort of learners and pick up any learners at risk of disengagement at an early stage of their course. As yet, it is too soon to show the impact on success rates; however, retention rates for the long courses are much improved on last year.

What progress has the college made in devising a mechanism for gathering and analysing meaningful progression data for all learners? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, with the exception of a few courses, managers and tutors did not collect sufficient or reliable data about learners progressing into employment, to external education providers or within the college. Managers were unable to identify whether learners were going onto modules within the same qualification or taking courses at a complementary or higher level.

Since then, a working group has been set up to explore a range of methods to capture the destinations of learners. In addition, a useful system to record the information has been set up. The process requires tutors to gain information from learners on their last day of their course through an exit interview and send this information to a dedicated data repository. Work to analyse the data is still in development at this stage in the academic year. Course reviews are to include this information, as is the self-assessment report. Internal progression information which is easier to collect and collate is good and clearly shows the progression learners make from short courses to longer and higher level courses as they begin to develop a firmer academic or career path.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has the college made in developing the quality of individual learning plans, targets and written feedback to learners? Are learners now clear about what they need to improve?

Reasonable progress

While tutors were enthusiastic at the previous inspection and support staff provided good individualised help for learners during taught sessions and in the learning resource centre, too few learners' individual learning plans had suitable development or learning targets based on the results of their initial assessment. Tutors provided a very mixed level of feedback to learners about how they can improve their skills and very little of this was written down or used to set targets.

A range of initiatives, introduced since the previous inspection including continuing professional development and a stronger focus on teaching, learning and assessment, is beginning to result in improved grades. Learners have a clearer understanding of the work set for them. Planning for individual learning is more comprehensive and includes good clear results of initial assessment to ensure the placement of learners onto the right level courses to meet their needs. The introduction of 'my learning space' as a progress monitoring tool and the electronic individual learning plan are being implemented and strengthened as tutors become more confident in their use. Additional learning support and records of specific interventions are good and learners report the value of this support, both pastoral and academic. All learners spoken to are glowing about the support they receive and the improvement to their study skills since they started their course. Written feedback to learners has much improved and clearly identifies what learners need to do to achieve a pass or higher grades in their assignments. Learners are confident in working through any comments made by tutors and report an increase in their ability to respond positively to criticism.

What progress has the college made in providing better opportunities to recognise, and where appropriate accredit, learners' functional skills learning?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, the incorporation of functional skills in mathematics, English and information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons was effective; this remains the case. However, accreditation of these skills was insufficient to enhance learners' progression to higher levels of study or employment. Since the inspection, the college has made significant progress in recognising and appropriately accrediting functional skills achievements.

Since spring 2013, learners have received accreditation for a good range of information technology beginners' courses at foundation level and intermediate level information and communication technology courses. In addition, digital arts courses in photography and film making have been added to the summer programme and will

be offered as accredited courses at Level 1 or 2 from September 2013. Functional skills accreditation at foundation and intermediate levels in English and mathematics is now available for learners through the college's bridge the gap, breakthrough and future proof programmes.

From September 2013 the college plans to offer a wide range of English and mathematics GCSE courses available on weekdays and as part of weekend modules.

Leadership and management

What progress has the college made in bringing together appraisal, observation of teaching and learning and course review systems? As a result are issues identified and dealt with at an earlier stage?

Reasonable progress

The progress made to bring together the college's observation of teaching and learning arrangements, course reviews and appraisal systems has been reasonable. A new curriculum structure provides improved oversight and performance management of teaching staff, with clearer roles and responsibilities for curriculum managers who will undertake staff appraisals and observations. Improved observation of teaching and learning processes is established and senior managers using new instruments have already carried out a small number of observations. Measures to provide training and shadowing opportunities for curriculum leads in the use of the new systems are in place. Observations of all teaching staff using the new system will be complete by mid-July 2013, and course leaders will use observation grades to inform course reviews. Good practice in evaluative writing and effective course review has been identified and successfully shared among course leaders and curriculum leads.

Plans are in place to enhance the annual appraisal process by means of a new mid-year performance review, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these measures. Senior managers recognise the need to harmonise the annual cycles for course review and appraisal, which currently operate on academic and calendar years respectively. Early planning suggests this will be achieved during 2013/14.

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