

Stockport College of Further and Higher Education

First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Stockport College following their inspection in the first week of October 2013, which found the college to be inadequate. The areas for improvement are the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; success rates and learners' progress; the rigour of quality assurance; and accommodation and resources. Foundation English and business studies were judged to be inadequate and other subject areas inspected were judged to require improvement, apart from teacher training which was good.

Themes

What progress has the college made in developing a robust action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at inspection?

The action plan is not focused sharply enough to ensure rapid improvement. It is a lengthy document, which does not make clear the urgent priorities. The leadership team has involved managers and staff across the college in the development of the plan. It lacks clarity and is repetitive. For example, the improvements relating to English and mathematics are referenced in several parts of the document rather than one clear set of actions.

The action plan lacks precision in target-setting and has no milestones to measure progress. The section titled 'targets for improvement' is often a repeat of proposed actions and describes processes being put in place. Throughout the plan there are many examples where targets, actions and impact are confused and this will hinder any monitoring that the college plans to complete at weekly management meetings.

There are very few quantifiable targets and insufficient ways of measuring what impact the proposed actions will have on the learners' experience. For example, a target in the current plan is for learners on advanced courses to have targets that stretch them. The progress/impact column refers to training for heads of department and reports being set up but not how improvement will be measured. The action plan does not get to the heart of the issue that advanced-level learners are not making sufficient progress and that 'value added' data show under-performance on many courses.

The post inspection action plans at subject area level are similarly too long and confusing with a lack of exactly what actions will be implemented rapidly, allocation of responsibilities and how these will be monitored.

Priorities for improvement

- The action plan should be redrafted urgently. It must identify clearly the key priorities and the immediate action that will be taken to improve.
- The plan must include clear timescales for implementing proposed actions and, most importantly, what data and other evidence will be used to judge progress, as well as how frequently progress will be evaluated.
- The plan should focus on managers taking action, with less time spent in meetings discussing the plans. For example, a discussion during the visit on apprentices' reviews revealed managers do not sample the quality of these reviews weekly to ensure prompt action for assessors takes place when reviews fall below the new expected standard.
- Similar priorities and immediate actions need to be identified quickly in each subject area so that improvements for current learners are rapid.

What progress is the college making in setting high expectations for staff and learners?

Senior leaders are meeting with departments to scrutinise the current performance of their learners. However, there is still far too much inconsistency in the extent to which staff implement college procedures. A lack of professional standards exists in too many classrooms (the section below on teaching and learning sets out evidence of this seen during the visit) and basic problems still exist, such as a lack of cleanliness in areas of the college.

Staff do not always comply with basic requirements. Although there have been improvements in the marking of registers, the post-inspection action plan sent to inspectors just before the monitoring visit included a target that said 'percentage registers marked to be greater than 95%', this does not reinforce the message of high standards and expectations.

Priorities for improvement

- As a matter of urgency, the college should carry out a 'back to basics' campaign to ensure that all registers are marked correctly, that all areas of the college are clean, and that staff promote professional standards with learners.
- Work needs to take place with learners to communicate the college's expectations of behaviour and standards to bring about the required cultural change. Senior and middle managers need to check more frequently how learners are responding to this. For example, greater monitoring should take

place at key times such as the start of the day, during breaks and at lesson change over times to ensure punctuality, and that learners are dressed appropriately in lessons and have basic equipment, such as pens.

What progress has been made to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?

A new system of monitoring teaching and learning is about to be implemented. This will include unannounced observations of lessons and will focus on a greater range of evidence, such as the standard of learners' work in folders. Managers are carrying out 'walkthroughs' in their departments and most managers interviewed as part of the visit had a good understanding of the issues they need to address. However, action to improve teaching and learning is too slow and some managers are reluctant to pursue issues with staff until they are confident this approach will be consistent across the college.

Most of the lessons visited by inspectors required improvement. Learners were generally compliant rather than enthused by the planned learning. Some were off task, chatting, doodling and looking at their phones. Some wear coats and hats inappropriately in lessons and bring food and fizzy drinks into classrooms. All this contributes to a lack of 'readiness to learn' and to strive for high achievement. Good practice does exist in the college but it is too variable. Too many teachers are not planning learning to engage the interest of the group or work that suits the needs of different learners in the class. Many poor practices were observed during the visit. For example, several learners were on the internet rather than completing the task they had been set, learners talked amongst themselves during the introductory section led by the teacher and one learner had their eyes closed throughout the teacher-led plenary. Too many teachers are not skilful at checking what learning is taking place.

Learners on advanced courses are still not being challenged enough to reach their full potential. Learners on a foundation-level course receive no homework, others spend too long out of the class carrying out tasks that are not well supervised, leading to time wasted. Some learners have longer and more frequent breaks than others and promptness in returning to lessons is an issue in some lessons.

A number of initiatives are in place to improve attendance and college figures show improvement, but lessons visited all had a few students missing.

Priorities for improvement

- Where managers are already aware of practice in teaching and learning that is less than good, they should take immediate action to improve this and give staff clear guidance and timescales for improvement.

- The college plans to implement the new system for monitoring teaching, learning and assessment speedily. It is important that findings from this visit are acted on quickly and that the college sets itself challenging targets to get a high proportion of teaching and learning to good or better within a short timescale.

To what extent is the college's performance-management system sufficiently rigorous to drive forward improvement quickly?

Performance management is not sufficiently rigorous. Although there is a clear policy for taking appropriate actions where teaching is deemed to be not good enough, the previous monitoring system has not identified many of the issues that needed to be tackled.

Managers are still too reluctant to deal with under-performance, for example, where staff have not kept learners' progress records up-to-date, they have not been given a deadline or a consequence if they fail to comply.

Governors have not been sufficiently robust in holding senior postholders to account. They have not reviewed appraisal arrangements and targets for senior post holders in the light of inspection outcomes. Governors have set up a task group that will meet monthly to monitor progress against the post-inspection action plan. However, governors have not received key information in a timely manner and in a format that helps them to monitor the college. For example, the post-inspection action plan was tabled at a recent governing body meeting, with the result that by the time of the monitoring visit, governors were not in a position to offer an analysis of the likely effectiveness of the plan. Data on success rates and other measures of learners' performance have focused on different subject areas and do not show clearly how different groups of learners achieve. Governors are linked to specific subject areas but recognise the need to sharpen the focus of visits to these areas.

Priorities for improvement

- The governing body should review its training needs to help it carry out more rigorous monitoring of the college in future. It should consider linking with governors at colleges judged good or outstanding.
- The governing body needs to review urgently the information it requires from the senior team to enable the board to monitor the effectiveness of actions being taken to improve the provision for learners.
- The governing body should review the appropriateness of targets and the appraisal process for senior postholders.

To what extent has the college improved English and mathematics provision?

GCSE classes have been restructured to bring about smaller classes and to set learners according to their ability. A GCSE English class visited was well taught but learners have been disadvantaged by the time taken to organise the provision appropriately.

Although the functional skills classes have been restructured, too many of these still require improvement. Classes include learners working at different levels from entry level to level two but they were all set the same task. Teachers give more support to those at lower levels but few use a range of resources to suit learners' different needs. In one class, the teacher told learners there would be words they did not understand in the handout and that they would carry out dictionary work later and this hampered their progress.

A major issue is that functional skills is still divorced from the learners' vocational areas. Learners go to a separate part of the college for these classes and the work they receive has no link to their vocational area. In one lesson, learners from performing arts, engineering and other subjects all worked on the same exercise and too many were bored. Although English skills are generic, it is better practice and more likely to engage learners if English and mathematics teachers work together with vocational tutors. The college is introducing a pilot project to do this in construction.

Priorities for improvement

- All vocational areas should work with functional-skills tutors to ensure planned learning in English and mathematics is relevant to learners and that attendance at functional-skills sessions improves.
- Staff should plan lessons that focus on learning at different levels where they have a mixture of levels in their group.

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