

Norton Radstock College

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 Norton Radstock College following publication of the most recent inspection report on 23 June 2014. At the inspection in May, outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were both assessed as requiring improvement. The effectiveness of leadership and management and the overall effectiveness of the college were judged as inadequate. Inspectors graded five curriculum areas. Animal care, equine studies and ICT were graded as good; health and social care and engineering were both graded as requiring improvement and motor vehicle studies was inadequate. For this first reinspection monitoring visit, the main focus was on the cross-college aspects of provision.

Themes

1. How much progress has the college made in developing an action plan that addresses the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report?

The college's post-inspection action plan demonstrates that senior managers and governors have analysed the inspection report in detail, reflected objectively on the weaknesses and recommendations contained in the report and identified a suitable range of strategies to promote improvement. The plan identifies those responsible for each activity, sets timescales and success measures and stipulates target impact.

While the action plan goes a significant way to proposing a range of suitable actions that may lead to improvements, it lacks sufficient clarity. In particular:

- the proposed strategies are not always clear and concise;
- the 'target impact' stated on the plan is ambiguous and adds little value;
- the 'success measures' section of the plan often duplicates the proposed actions and does not always illustrate precisely what impact managers intend to have as a result of each action.

Not all senior curriculum leaders recognise the urgency with which the college should bring about improvements. The organisational culture is such that they do not all take full responsibility for their role in quality improvement.

Priorities for improvement

- Managers should consider simplifying or clarifying the quality improvement action plan, particularly the sections identifying success and impact measures.

- Managers should ensure that action plans at curriculum level focus sufficiently on those strategies that will have maximum impact.
- Senior managers should empower curriculum managers to be more responsible and accountable for key components of quality improvement within their respective curriculum areas, stipulate expected outcomes, and provide guidance and support to enable them to monitor progress against the action plan.
- Managers and governors should regularly review progress against the post-inspection action plan and amend the improvement strategies where progress is slow.

2. What actions have governors taken to support and challenge senior leaders, to build the capacity of the senior team and to increase the focus and momentum on raising standards?

Following the inspection, governors have scrutinised the post-inspection action plan and have agreed to increase the frequency with which the quality committee will meet to review progress against this plan. The board acknowledges that it needs to broaden and strengthen the expertise of its membership, and is in the process of recruiting or seconding additional members. Governors have also acknowledged that they need to strengthen their insight and understanding of the curriculum and are setting up opportunities to spend more time with teachers and learners, shadowing learning activities.

Despite these positive actions, governors are still not challenging the senior management team sufficiently and are being too slow to put in place suitable support mechanisms for them. Minutes of the governing body meetings do not reflect sufficient urgency or capture the actions that are essential to help bring about rapid and sustained improvements.

Priorities for improvement

- Governors should regularly review the skillset of the board and consider if, and when they need to carry out their proposed actions to strengthen and broaden the skillset of its membership.
- Governors should also ensure that they follow through with their intentions to create regular opportunities to observe the quality of the curriculum first-hand by strengthening curriculum links, meeting staff and learners and undertaking learning walks within the various departments. This will enable them to strengthen their insight and understanding of the curriculum.
- Governors should provide a higher level of challenge to managers through the full board and in particular through the work of the quality committee.

- Governors should ensure that they create suitable opportunities to engage experts to support, guide and mentor members of the senior team, in particular, creating coaching and/or mentoring opportunities for both the Vice Principal - curriculum and quality and the Principal, thereby building the capacity of the executive team.
- Chairs of key governor committees should consider shadowing meetings of the board of governors of a high performing college to help develop their insight into best practice in governance, and ensure they are clear about approaches to the best way of challenging and supporting the senior team.
- Governing body papers and minutes of the governing body meetings should be more succinct, and focus more on identifying key priorities and actions for improvement.
- Governors should ensure that they maintain a focus on longer-term strategic options for the college that would be in the best interests of learners, the local community and staff.

3. What measures and timeline have senior leaders and governors put in place to track and monitor progress in improvements?

Following the recent inspection, senior leaders and governors now appreciate the imperative of placing greater urgency on the drive to raise the quality of provision. As part of the quality improvement action planning, senior leaders have defined timescales for improvements. However, the links between proposed actions and the timings of the intended impact are not always sufficiently clear. Governors have proposed an increase in the frequency of review meetings, in particular for the quality committee. They also intend to attend curriculum area meetings to enable closer and more regular dialogue with staff. Senior managers have drawn up a thorough quality review cycle for the forthcoming academic year, which schedules curriculum reviews, audits of lesson plans and schemes of work, learning walks, quality reviews of curriculum areas and reviews of tutorial weeks.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure managers monitor progress against the proposed quality improvement actions frequently, and regularly review and update target dates where necessary.
- Implement fully all stages proposed in the quality improvement cycle.
- Ensure, as proposed, that governors increase the frequency of review meetings of the quality committee.

4. What key staff development priorities have been identified to help drive improvement? What plans are in place to deliver them and to share good practice more widely across the college?

Following the inspection, managers have reviewed the inspection report carefully and drawn up an appropriate programme of workshops and development initiatives for teaching staff. This includes sessions focusing, for example, on functional skills, assessment strategies, using individual learning plans, embedding equality and diversity in lesson planning, and using e-technology effectively in lessons. In addition, managers have created a network of opportunities to share good practice internally between staff. Managers are putting in place a more thorough lesson observation process. A team of learning coaches is available to help and support staff where necessary.

While this approach goes some way to putting in place a range of suitable staff development priorities to address the weaknesses identified in the report, the staff development plan does not link closely enough to other review processes. Two areas in particular are weak:

- managers do not utilise the information from lesson observations sufficiently thoroughly to help set individual staff development priorities.
- the staff appraisal and professional development planning process is weak. It does not enable detailed analysis or identification of the development priorities for individual members of staff.

Overall, the culture of staff development is weak. Curriculum and senior managers currently do not recognise the part they should be playing in review and development of their team. Staff at all levels of the organisation are not sufficiently aware of their developmental priorities. They do not all engage regularly in suitably detailed developmental discussions with their line manager. They are not mandated to attend those activities that would enable them to improve. Managers do not review the progress of their team members regularly.

While staff have the opportunity to share good practice internally, the college has not explored fully how good practice might be shared more widely, for example with other providers in the region.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure information from lesson observations and from professional reviews and development discussions feeds more closely into identification of individual and cross-college staff development needs.
- Radically overhaul processes and procedures associated with the staff appraisal and professional development planning process (see '5' below).

- Urgently initiate a management development programme, which should focus in particular on:
 - developing leadership skills of managers
 - empowering managers to be more accountable for quality improvement within their areas
 - training managers on how to take responsibility for the performance review and development of their team
 - understanding and utilising college policies and procedures more effectively and efficiently.
- Use existing, and develop new, networks to identify opportunities for sharing best practice with good and outstanding providers across the region.

5. What plans are in place and what action has been taken to improve performance management arrangements?

The college's staff appraisal and professional development planning process is weak. Managers make insufficient distinction between the process of setting performance objectives and individual development objectives. Managers' approach to appraisal is poor. Few staff across the college receive regular, timely or detailed reviews. Despite a recent review of the staff appraisal policy and procedure, the new process plays only a superficial role in driving improvements across the college.

Priorities for improvement

- Urgently review all policies, procedures and supporting documentation associated with staff appraisal and professional development planning so that performance review and development can play a more pivotal role in quality improvement across the college. Consider drawing on best practice from an outstanding provider within the region.
- Brief all managers and staff on the new scheme and set unequivocal expectations about the role of both managers and team members on how the scheme should be utilised to help set and monitor performance targets for individuals and develop the expertise of staff, thereby helping to drive improvement across the college.

6. What action has been taken in motor vehicle to reinforce and embed safe working practices in workshops?

College managers have approached this weakness with urgency and rigour. They have taken suitable steps to address the main weaknesses identified at inspection and have improved the approach of staff and students to health and safety procedures not only in motor vehicle, but also more widely across the college and in the workplace.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure health and safety remains high profile, whilst actively working to embed best practice among staff and students. Managers should continue to:
 - carry out regular risk assessments where appropriate
 - brief staff on the expectations and responsibilities for ensuring safe working environments and minimising risks to learners
 - ensure students receive a full briefing in all curriculum areas as part of their induction, stipulating the college's expectations relating to health and safety and the use of personal and protective clothing
 - brief employers to ensure they are aware of the health and safety approach that they should adopt and promote for all workplace learners
 - review and monitor regularly classroom and workshop procedures to ensure safe working practices.

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