

Stockport College

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130512

Name of lead inspector: Sue Harrison HMI

Last day of inspection: 26 September 2014

Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Wellington Road South
Stockport
Cheshire
SK1 3UQ

Telephone number: 0161 958 3100

Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

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

The first monitoring visit took place towards the end of November 2013. It found a number of weaknesses in the post-inspection action plan and recommended that urgent action was needed on several issues. A new interim principal took up post just before the second monitoring visit in February 2014. At this visit, inspectors found reasonable improvement for learners, especially in terms of a cleaner learning environment. Teaching and learning, provision in English and mathematics and performance management showed reasonable improvement although weaknesses remained in each of these areas. The third visit in May 2014 found the pace of improvement too slow. Although teaching and learning continued to show reasonable improvement, as did planned curriculum developments, other aspects of the action plan were judged to be having insufficient impact in improving the experience of learners.

The themes and findings of this visit are outlined below:

Themes

To what extent has the college improved success rates for learners in 2013/14?

College data show that overall success rates did not improve in 2013/14. A high proportion of learners left the college throughout the year without completing their courses. At the start of this academic year college records indicate that very few learners have left the college so far, and that the retention rate is good for students returning to the second year of a two-year course. Improved initial advice and guidance and enrolment procedures have contributed to improved retention at the start of this year. This includes making sure students are on the right course, and maintaining contact with existing students over the summer.

Pass rates improved on some courses, for example students on business and information technology courses achieved high pass rates following a concerted effort

by staff to ensure students completed portfolios. However, this improvement is not consistent and pass rates remain low on many construction and engineering courses. The overall pass rates are now similar to the national rate for intermediate-level and advanced-level courses, but pass rates declined and are too low on foundation-level courses.

Success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices improved in 2013/14 but are still too low. The proportion of advanced apprentices achieving within the planned timeframe is now close to the national rate but far too many apprentices did not complete within the planned time.

English and mathematics results are not good enough. Mathematics results are better than those for English. Over two-thirds of adult students taking GCSE mathematics in 2013/14 gained a grade C or above but results for learners aged 16–18 were lower at 47%. Success rates in English GCSE were poor for adults and younger learners. The college is still waiting for a significant number of final results in functional skills English and mathematics but managers recognise that success rates remain too low.

Insufficient improvement for learners

How far has the college improved the organisation and delivery of English and mathematics provision in the current year?

The way in which English and mathematics provision is organised and delivered to learners is much better this term. Initial assessments of students' levels and ability took place much earlier than last year, so that students are generally placed on an appropriate course from the outset. Teachers have appropriate specialist skills in English or mathematics. The classes are now delivered in the vocational areas so that the learning can be contextualised. For example, in an English lesson for students on business studies courses, the teacher gives appropriate emphasis to specialist vocabulary they need to understand and be able to spell. However, some aspects of contextualisation, particularly in mathematics, are too superficial and do not develop or reinforce vocational standards.

Staff teaching the vocational qualifications now work well with English and mathematics staff to reinforce the learning. Students are allocated to classes according to level of ability so that teachers can plan learning much more effectively than last year. As a result of all these changes, learners are more positive and attendance at English and mathematics lessons has improved, though it is still not good at all lessons. Punctuality at morning lessons is poor and not challenged sufficiently by staff.

Teachers now identify individual targets for each learner, though these targets are often too broad. Work is assessed early on in the course in English, with helpful feedback to learners on how they can improve. Although work is set and assessed in

mathematics, there is a need for a greater drive to ensure all students complete homework on time and carry out corrections.

Some teachers are still less skilled than others in the strategies needed to promote learning in the classroom. Directed teacher questioning helps to check learners' understanding, but in mathematics students are not encouraged sufficiently to solve problems for themselves. In English and mathematics, good examples exist of learners doing different work to develop their individual skills at an appropriate pace, but not all teachers use this good practice. Resources to support learning have improved since the last monitoring visit. In mathematics, for example, a good range of resources is in place to support different levels of ability within the classroom and independent on-line learning outside lessons.

Reasonable improvement for learners

What further progress has been made to improve teaching, learning and assessment since the last monitoring visit?

A substantial amount of staff development has taken place since the last visit to improve teaching, learning and assessment, but the college needs to increase the monitoring of the extent to which this is having an impact on practice in the classroom, and the progress made by learners. Advanced lecturers have recently started work in each curriculum area to consolidate training and target it more on individual teacher's needs.

Inspectors found examples of good practice in lessons – such as: the use of targeted question and answer to extend students' thinking; effective maintenance of students' interest through topics they can identify with to illustrate theory and relate it to the real world; and group work that builds well on whole-class input and is effectively managed to ensure all are making progress. Attendance is generally much better than at the time of the inspection.

However, too many lessons continue to require improvement. Issues in these lessons include students not being clear on the learning objectives of activities, lack of effective assessment strategies that help students to see how they can improve their work, and insufficient attention to the wider employability skills students need to develop. An example of the latter was observed on an advanced course where students presented their findings on research they had completed; the content of their work was of a high standard but they lacked presentation skills and merely read the information on slides with their backs turned to the class. Plenary sessions following group work are another area for improvement; teachers should ensure that all students can hear the contributions from their peers and that plenaries are not too rushed.

Sharing of good practice is not sufficiently widespread, for example inspectors found effective development of students' employability skills in courses preparing students

for the service industries. Another example of insufficient sharing of good practice relates to getting students to organise their work efficiently from the start of the course; students on childcare courses have well-organised files but this is less evident in health and social care.

Reasonable improvement for learners

To what extent has the governing body improved its oversight of the college since the last visit?

Since the last monitoring visit, the governing body has appointed a new chair and vice-chair, and strengthened the educational expertise of its members. A formal training plan is in place for governors, which includes inputs from external sources. Governors now offer a greater level of challenge to the senior leadership team. The board shows increased awareness of the need to scrutinise data and information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Members are developing checks and balances that enable them to probe more deeply the evidence underpinning the reports they receive, and to check the impact of measures taken by senior managers. For example, minutes of meetings show governors asking for clarification on value added measures of students' progress. Governors have requested that key performance indicators are amended to better meet their raised expectations.

Governors are very aware of the challenges facing the college, including continuing efforts to appoint a permanent principal, and the need to establish long-term financial stability. Curriculum changes and changes within the local context have contributed to reduced learner enrolment figures this September and college finances remain a key challenge. However, within a very tight budget constraint, governors and managers have prioritised the learning environment and the need to allocate resources to improve the learners' experience.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Has the college continued to improve accommodation and resources since the last monitoring visit?

The college continues to implement planned refurbishment and redecoration; this is not yet complete but inspectors have found further improvement at each monitoring visit. Improvements in cleanliness are being maintained. A decision to zone curriculum areas so that each has its own suite of accommodation means staff and students show greater ownership of their work areas, for example with more displays of subject-related topics and students' work. This vocational/subject identity has a positive impact on punctuality as fewer students are late due to movement from one area of the campus to another.

Managers and staff pay greater attention to site security, with frequent checks to ensure everyone is wearing their college identity badge. Managers are more visible in and around corridors, there is less litter and more positive behaviour of learners around the college. In a few lessons students come to college not prepared for work with pens and other equipment, but the majority of learners are responding well to the culture of higher expectations that the college is trying to promote.

Reasonable improvement for learners

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk