

Norton Radstock College

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Peter Nelson HMI

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Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Norton Radstock College
South Hill Park
Radstock
BA3 3RW

Telephone number: 01761 433161

Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection monitoring visit to Norton Radstock College following publication of the inspection report on 23 June 2014, which judged that the college was inadequate. The major areas for improvement related to inadequate leadership and management, the slow rate of improvement since the previous inspection, teaching, learning and assessment that required improvement, poor progress and progression of students, and the poor development of students' competence in English and mathematics.

A reinspection monitoring visit took place in July 2014. Following the visit, a published report clearly identified key strategies that would help contribute to improvement. This second monitoring visit explored the progress that governors, senior managers and staff have made in raising the quality of provision at the college.

Themes

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?

Insufficient improvement for learners

The Principal has failed to increase the focus and momentum sufficiently on quality improvement, and has not addressed all the recommendations made at the most recent monitoring visit in July. As a result, the college is making insufficient progress in raising standards.

The Chairman of the corporation and the governing body have failed to hold the Principal and other senior managers to account sufficiently for the urgent improvements that are required across the college. The Chairman has not created opportunities for governors to shadow governor meetings in high performing colleges to help them observe and then develop best practice in governance.

The quality improvement and standards committee has failed to consider the most recent monitoring visit report from Ofsted and has been slow to resolve actions identified at previous meetings.

Governors have identified the need to strengthen the financial expertise of the board. Despite their efforts to recruit a suitable new member with a financial background, governors have not yet managed to accomplish this. Despite recommendations at the last visit, few governors have created opportunities to familiarise themselves

more with curriculum areas in the college, to meet with students and staff, and to acquaint themselves more with day-to-day classroom-based activities.

Governors have successfully engaged the support of external consultants as an interim measure to help fill the skills gaps in the senior management team and increase the team's capacity to bring about improvements. Governors have also successfully maintained their focus on the longer-term strategic options for the college.

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

Insufficient improvement for learners

Leaders and managers have drawn up an action plan that addresses the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report and considers the factors specified in the reinspection monitoring visit in July. However, not all leaders and managers fully recognise the urgency with which improvements need to be made. The Principal and a minority of key curriculum managers have demonstrated insufficient insight and ownership of the quality improvement plan. Managers have not yet made progress on all the actions identified in their action plan.

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

Insufficient improvement for learners

The Principal has failed to ensure that managers have completed the performance review and target-setting process with all members of their team. In addition, the Principal has not completed her own formal review of performance, or agreed performance targets with the Chairman of the corporation. Governors therefore have no targets against which they can objectively evaluate the performance of the Principal.

Managers have updated the policy and procedure underpinning the performance review process. They have also received training in carrying out performance review and development meetings with staff and most are now starting to take responsibility for the performance management of their teams.

What measures and timelines have senior leaders and governors put in place to track and monitor the progress of improvements?

Reasonable improvement for learners

The capacity and focus of the curriculum management team has recently increased with support from interim managers. The management team now holds weekly meetings with curriculum and quality managers. In the meetings they review

progress, identify those areas where actions are having the most impact and focus on improvement. Managers from within the quality review team have also carried out valuable audits to assess the impact of a range of quality improvement interventions. Feedback from these audits is proving valuable in continuing to shape ongoing improvement initiatives.

The quality improvement and standards committee is responsible on behalf of the full governing body for reviewing in detail the effectiveness of quality improvement activities. The group is now meeting more frequently and beginning to provide greater challenge to managers and senior leaders. It should, however, ensure that it raises its level of expectations, considers the outcomes from Ofsted monitoring visits more closely and holds senior managers more to account, reinforcing the urgency to bring about improvements.

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?

Reasonable improvement for learners

Managers have designed and initiated a staff and management development programme that is starting to help support key priorities for improvement. Teachers have received training on topics including how to improve the quality of target setting, the use of electronic individual learning plans, and embedding mathematics, English and employability skills within their lessons. Teachers are starting to apply this training. Attendance at staff training is now mandatory and part-time staff receive payment for attending. Managers follow up any absence from staff training.

Learning coaches regularly run sessions with groups of teachers to share best practice and foster innovation in lesson planning and delivery. The college is increasing the number of staff it trains and authorises to carry out lesson observations as part of the teaching, learning and assessment improvement strategy. Staff are identifying an increasing range of opportunities, both within the college and externally, to develop networks to help them to share best practice. Information from quality audits and from lesson observations provides feedback on the impact of these training activities. This range of initiatives is helping managers to assess the effectiveness of the training, thereby enabling them to increase the focus on activities that lead to improvements.

The management development programme is starting to help managers improve their insight into leadership and accountability and is beginning to develop a stronger team ethos within the college.

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