

# Weymouth College

## First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130653

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**Type of provider:** General further education college

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# Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

## Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Weymouth College following publication of the most recent inspection report on 18 February 2015. At the inspection in January, outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were judged as good; the effectiveness of leadership and management and the overall effectiveness of the college were judged as inadequate. Inspectors graded five curriculum areas: health and social care; early years and playwork; hospitality and catering; performing arts; and foundation English; all of which were judged as good. For this first re-inspection monitoring visit, the main focus was on aspects of leadership, management and governance. The inspector held meetings with the Chair of Governors, the Principal and nominee, the senior leadership team, the clerk to the corporation and sector area managers, and reviewed key quality improvement action plans, minutes of meetings and other sources of evidence created since the inspection.

## Themes

### **What progress has the college made to develop an action plan that addresses the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection report, and how will managers and governors monitor progress against the plan?**

The senior leadership team has been prompt in drawing up a series of actions and priorities aimed at addressing those weaknesses identified at inspection, and incorporating them into the corporate quality improvement plans. In addition, sector area managers have used information from the inspection to update subject level improvement plans. The plans demonstrate a clear understanding and acceptance by all managers and governors of the need to remedy weaknesses, to ensure the longer-term viability of the college and maintain high standards. The corporate improvement plan clearly identifies which colleagues are responsible for leading on each improvement activity, as well as linking a governor to each action. These governors are responsible for providing support and challenge, and maintaining an overview of progress against the improvement plan.

Senior managers and governors have access to suitable data and information to help them monitor progress. They also have an appropriate schedule of review meetings in place to track and monitor progress against the quality improvement activities.

Governors and senior leaders have been successful in generating very positive drive amongst the staff team to raise standards and address weaker areas through a culture of mutual support and a supportive, solution-focused approach.

## Priorities for improvement

- Governors should maintain a very close overview of improvement activities, ensuring leaders and managers receive suitable support and challenge, and hold them to account to address fully those actions identified in the improvement plan.
- Senior leaders and managers should ensure they maintain the positive determination of staff and the supportive, solution-focused approach to help drive improvements.
- Managers and governors should regularly review progress against the post-inspection action plan and amend the improvement strategies in any areas where progress is slow.

### **What actions have governors taken to ensure that they have the necessary financial expertise and suitable checks and balances to maintain a close overview of the college's financial status?**

Since the appointment of an interim Vice Principal for finance and business planning, members of the corporation have a high level of confidence in the financial information they are receiving, which they report is accurate and consistent. They indicate an improving and more certain financial position.

Governors have reviewed their membership and are in the process of strengthening membership to incorporate a broader cross-section of expertise, including new members with a suitable financial background. In addition, the new Chair has reviewed allocation of the chair roles for the subcommittees, both for audit, and for finance committees.

Senior managers and governors continue to liaise with colleagues from the Commissioner's office to review progress against the financial recovery plan and the strategic development of the college.

The board has made the decision to maintain interim arrangements for two senior post holders. While these appear to be effective, there is a significant element of uncertainty associated with these interim arrangements.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- The Chair of Governors and clerk to the corporation should complete amendments to membership of the board committees. They should also continue to monitor full corporation membership, to ensure there is sufficient expertise on the board to maintain a suitable overview of the financial and strategic developments of the college.
- In particular, the Chair and clerk should also ensure suitably experienced and skilled board colleagues remain in the key posts of chairs of the finance and audit committees, and that those committees carry out their duties thoroughly and with suitable rigour.

- The Chair, clerk and senior leadership team should also ensure that, over the medium term, any risks associated with the interim arrangements of senior post holders are managed carefully. In addition, governors should ensure that suitable succession plans are in place for corporation membership, and also for the appointment to senior post holders within the college over the longer term.
- The senior leadership team and governors must continue to manage progress against the financial recovery plan and ensure it stays on target against financial projections.

### **What approach are senior leaders and governors adopting towards strategic and business planning to create a financially viable curriculum that provides for local student and commercial needs?**

The senior leadership team and governors have recently adopted a guarded approach to curriculum planning, and to the financial forecasting and course costing associated with future curriculum models. Senior managers are working closely with local community organisations and employers to identify possible new opportunities for curriculum development.

All sector area managers understand the importance of careful course costing to ensure that every course makes a positive financial contribution. Managers indicate that they have access to detailed, accurate and timely information to assist them in planning and monitoring financial and performance data which enable them to track and monitor progress, for example on application numbers, recruitment, retention and departmental expenditure. Managers receive suitable guidance from staff at the college with financial expertise, to support them in the more technical elements of financial monitoring and control.

The senior leadership team has contracted with an external consultant to support the development of a curriculum plan. As a result, key curriculum areas have been identified for possible growth or managed reduction.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Governors and senior leaders should maintain a clear focus on curriculum planning to ensure the college offers a suitably broad curriculum that responds to local community priorities and exploits the evolving training and development needs of local employers; they should also ensure that every area of the curriculum makes a positive contribution.
- Governors and senior leaders should, wherever possible, design the college curriculum to complement that of other local providers.
- All staff should ensure that they make the best use of information, advice and guidance to inform students about the opportunities at the college, and advise them on the courses that might best meet their developmental needs and career aspirations.

## **How are managers addressing weak performance in those areas of the curriculum where outcomes for students were low in the last academic year?**

Senior managers acknowledge that certain key areas of the curriculum under-performed in the previous academic year, in particular some of the AS- and A-level provision. They have reviewed those areas that under-performed and have undertaken a restructure with the intention of utilising the expertise of subject area managers to best effect in bringing about improvements in the quality of the curriculum.

Senior managers and governors are taking a particularly active interest in all areas of the curriculum that under-performed in the previous academic year through careful monitoring of performance and holding managers to account for improvements in these areas.

A team of teaching, learning and assessment champions is also working to identify a range of improvement strategies aimed at addressing any quality issues in teaching, learning and assessment and providing suitable training and support activities for academic staff to bring about improvements.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Managers should ensure thorough quality assurance and course review procedures remain in place to identify promptly any course where elements of performance decline, and take suitable actions to militate against this happening. Managers should clearly define suitably rigorous entry criteria for each course and ensure that they adhere to these during the recruitment process, providing further advice on alternative course opportunities if students fail to achieve these entry criteria.
- Governors should focus in particular on those lower-performing areas and hold leaders of these to account for improvements.

## **How are managers ensuring that all staff strive to maintain and improve the high quality of teaching, learning and assessment that was evident at the inspection?**

Staff and governors at the college recognise the importance of maintaining a careful focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for students, while managing the challenging financial recovery of the college. They appreciate the importance of careful curriculum design, set in the context of current and future market opportunities and the evolving wider education and training requirements of the region.

All managers have a strong sense of ownership of quality assurance processes and take an active interest in the performance and development of staff within their management teams. They stress the importance of continuing to identify suitable

strategies and staff development activities that will help maintain and improve the overall quality of the provision.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- All staff should maintain a close focus on the drive for quality improvement that resulted in the improved grades for teaching, learning and assessment at the recent inspection, and improved outcomes for learners.
- Managers should use processes such as staff review, lesson observation and information on students' performance shared through team meetings to identify any areas where the quality of provision might be at risk of declining, and identifying suitable strategies and staff development opportunities to militate against that decline.
- Leaders and managers should focus closely on prioritising staff development activities that will have the maximum impact on maintaining and raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers should actively seek out best practice from across the college and provide suitable opportunities for staff to share such practice, as well as trying new strategies and, if successful, availing other staff of them.

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