

St Helens College

Monitoring visit report

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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 an inspection monitoring visit to monitor the progress of the new full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-olds in the college in the first year of its operation.

This college has had full-time provision in place for 14 to 16-year-olds since September 2014. It has 42 learners in this age group in its academy.

The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium additional funding is well above national average. The proportion with special educational needs is well above the national average.

Themes

What progress has the college made in implementing clear admissions and exclusion policies for its 14 to 16 provision? Significant

The admissions policy is clear and is in line with Department for Education guidelines. Prospective students must demonstrate a commitment to a vocational specialism and skills in English and mathematics that are adequate to study in their chosen vocational areas. The academy has an inclusive approach to potential students who meet these criteria and prioritises disadvantaged groups, such as young people in care. Admissions procedures are clear and an appropriate appeals process is in place. Parents and students welcome the series of transition events that take place in the summer to enable prospective students to sample what the academy offers, to meet other prospective students and to get to know the staff before they make a final decision.

The exclusion policy is clearly outlined and in line with Department for Education guidelines. No exclusions have taken place this year. The academy has close links with the local authority to ensure swift sharing of information should the situation arise where a student needed to be transferred to another provider. The academy works well with the Education Welfare Service in providing extra support for students where needed.

What progress has the college made in providing sufficient, appropriately qualified staff to lead and teach the provision and to support the learners? Significant

The academy is led by a well-qualified and suitably experienced headteacher, who has worked in senior positions in schools. The headteacher is also the special education coordinator and has appropriate training and experience to undertake this role. The academy has in place appropriately qualified and well trained staff to meet the needs of students aged 14 to 16. All staff teaching GCSE subjects and the

citizenship and tutorial programme have qualified teacher status. Vocational staff have a range of teaching qualifications and are specialists in their vocational area. All staff completed training, before the academy opened, on policies and procedures that are relevant to this particular age group. They also shared good practice on teaching and learning methods. Staff development has a high priority in the academy and training sessions take place weekly to update staff, discuss students' progress and continue to share best practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Parents and students state that the academy is well led and that staff are approachable, know the students well and help them to aspire to achieve.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that the curriculum is sufficiently broad and covers all statutory subjects? Significant

The curriculum is well designed to ensure all students follow GCSE courses in English Language, English Literature, mathematics, science, computer science and citizenship. They also study religious education and physical education, and the college chaplain, alongside local religious leaders, provides diversity in religious study and daily collective worship. In addition, students choose from a range of vocational subjects or additional GCSEs in business, sociology and media studies. The vocational subjects students study this year are engineering, health and social care, childcare, construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and hospitality and catering. The academy also offers history and a modern foreign language but none of the current students have chosen these options.

All students follow a structured tutorial programme, which focuses on a range of topics, including health education and social, moral and cultural values that help to prepare students for life in modern Britain. The academy places a strong emphasis on respect for each other and this is evident in the classroom and at break and lunch times.

Students benefit from an enrichment programme, where they can choose to pursue an interest in areas as diverse as animal care, cooking, art and motor vehicle skills. A particular strength of the curriculum is the emphasis placed on careers education and guidance. Students develop their understanding of the world of work through visits to employers and enterprise activities. This is helping to prepare them for the work experience they will carry out in the second year of their course.

What progress has the college made in quality assuring and evaluating all aspects of the provision for continuous improvement? Significant

The academy has rigorous and effective systems in place to track learners' attendance and progress. Any unauthorised absence is followed up immediately with parents/carers and appropriate action is put in place to address the situation, including home visits where necessary. Students enjoy coming to the academy and the overwhelming majority attend regularly.

In addition to weekly discussions about students' progress, a formal check takes place every six weeks when students are assessed using past examination papers. Parents receive a report and are invited to a parents' evening every half-term. These regular checks enable staff to identify lapses in progress quickly and put appropriate interventions in place. Students have clear targets in each subject and are placed in ability groupings according to their targets. Data from assessments are used well to move students between groups, where appropriate, and to ensure students receive targeted additional support.

The headteacher of the academy has established a culture of high expectations for students, many of whom under-achieved at Key Stage 3. Rigorous self-assessment procedures have given the headteacher and staff a clear understanding of areas requiring further improvement. Performance management is strong, with teachers receiving extra training where necessary followed by re-observation to check progress.

The views of parents and students are canvassed regularly and acted upon to drive continuous improvement. Parents speak of how their children have improved their confidence and motivation to improve their attainment grades since starting at the academy. The academy's data indicate good levels of progress against students' starting points. The headteacher of the academy reports regularly to the Principal of the college and the governors.

What progress has the college made in providing learners with sufficient student care, guidance and support, including the implementation of a behaviour policy appropriate for learners aged 14 to 16? Significant

Students' behaviour is good. Students understand the clear steps in the 'behaviour for learning ladder' and appreciate how good behaviour in the classroom is helping them to concentrate in lessons. Parents and students are very positive about the pastoral support provided by the academy. Parents spoke about the positive impact they see in their children as a result of being treated as individuals. Parents of children with additional needs, such as those on the autistic spectrum, praise the supportive culture of the academy. Each student meets with a mentor once a fortnight, where problems can be discussed. Targets are agreed with the student to help improve their work and address personal concerns. The academy has good links with a range of external agencies to offer specialist support. All students receive careers advice from an impartial, specialist careers advisor to help them consider future plans.

What progress has the provider made in providing good quality teaching, learning and assessment? Significant

A robust lesson observation process is in place and staff receive feedback and coaching to improve teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, the headteacher

visits lessons on a regular basis to check on standards. As well as observing teaching, students' work and their progress over time are scrutinised. This gives the headteacher a thorough picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Academy data show a large majority of lessons to be good or better and inspectors found this to be the case in the sample visited during the monitoring visit.

Has the college implemented appropriate measures to ensure that all learners are reasonably safeguarded and that it meets its statutory duty for safeguarding in relation to learners of this age group? **Yes**

The academy has appropriate measures in place to meet its statutory safeguarding duties. The majority of the curriculum is delivered in the designated academy building used solely by students aged 14 to 16. Security for gaining entrance to this building is robust. Where students attend vocational lessons elsewhere in the college, or use catering facilities in other buildings, appropriate supervisory arrangements are in place. All staff attend training on safeguarding procedures and required employment checks are carried out by the college's human resources department. Designated safeguarding officers are in place and their contact details are readily available. Students say they feel very safe at the academy. Through the tutorial programme, students are supported to understand the different forms of bullying and clear procedures are in place for the reporting of any incidents. Two students have been trained as anti-bullying ambassadors. The headteacher takes prompt and effective action to intervene in any disputes between students. Where safeguarding concerns arise, the academy follows clear procedures to involve external agencies, such as social services, and incidents are well documented to track subsequent action.

Strengths and areas of weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers have detailed knowledge of individual students, their abilities and aspirations. There is a consistent approach to planning lessons across the academy and teachers are skilled at taking account of different needs and abilities in their groups. Good relations between teachers and students foster a positive attitude to learning. Students enjoy their studies and recognise the value of English and mathematics to their career prospects and personal lives. This is helped by the way schemes of work are cross-referenced between vocational and GCSE subjects so that students see skills are transferable and link to the world of work. Inspectors saw teachers in English and mathematics lessons getting students to think of how the topic would be relevant in their vocational options. Vocational staff successfully embed literacy and numeracy skills in ways relevant to their subject. Teachers use information and learning technology skilfully to develop students' understanding and check on their progress. For example, in a health and social care lesson, a short video clip effectively helped students to analyse how to improve patient-nurse interaction.

The work of teachers and teaching assistants is well coordinated in classes. In addition, intervention groups are in place for all the core subjects. For example, during an English class, three learners worked separately from the main group, which enabled them to be taught the same topic but at a pace that was appropriate to their level of progress.

In a small number of lessons, teachers' questioning techniques are less successful in gauging students' knowledge and understanding. Occasionally students are not engaged or challenged sufficiently throughout a lesson. In one example, a more able student finished work before the rest of the group and was not given a more stretching task. In another, the planned citizenship lesson worked well with the more able students but learning for students in set three was too limited.

Assessment of students' work is good. Homework is set regularly and is marked and returned promptly. All teachers give students advice on how they can improve their work, and most follow up on whether students have acted on this. In a few cases, teachers need to be more rigorous in checking that students respond to feedback.

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