

# West Cheshire College

Re-inspection 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 the first re-inspection monitoring visit to West Cheshire College following publication of the inspection report on 11 November 2015 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

At the inspection in September 2015, the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for students were judged inadequate. Personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged to require improvement. Study programmes for students aged 16 to 19 years were judged inadequate. Adult learning provision was judged to require improvement. Apprenticeships were judged good.

This first monitoring visit focused on the improvement action plan, safeguarding, the requirements of study programmes, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, actions taken to ensure that students make good progress and performance review of underperforming programme areas.

### Themes

#### **What progress have governors, leaders and managers made in producing and implementing a clear action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at inspection?**

Governors had been surprised that predicted performance, of which they were informed prior to the recent inspection, turned out to be over-optimistic. This underlines the need for action planning to be based on accurate and measurable data. Finding out more about what lies behind the data is also important, and governors wherever possible need to be more aware of learners' experience in the college.

Leaders and managers quickly added to the college's quality improvement plan the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in September 2015. The resulting post-inspection action plan covers the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in an over-long document that does not prioritise the key actions that will make the biggest difference for learners' experience and outcomes. The plan states the improvements required, allocates responsibilities, and identifies actions to be taken with deadlines and intended outcomes, but does so in an overly descriptive way.

The plan is supported by a key performance indicator dashboard, which is also a very long document; key aspects of data are missing, for example, value added data and the targets for the proportion of learners achieving high grades. As a result, it is difficult to see quickly how well the college's actions are making a difference for current learners. The plan has not yet been approved by governors.

The plan is too focused on processes rather than on the impact on learners. It does not always specify the intended outcome in a way that can be measured, except for success rates and attendance. The targets on attendance are contradictory in several places in the plan and they do not always match the targets in the data dashboard. Consequently, it is not clear to governors, managers, staff and learners what is expected and this does not set out clearly enough the high standards that will raise aspirations.

In a few cases the description of the intended improvement is too vague: for example, one objective is 'further embed processes'. The timescale or deadline for intended outcomes are not specified and in too many places they are vague. For example, one intended outcome is 'underperformance addressed quickly'.

Managers have not identified and measured the college's current position and established baseline data against which they can set and monitor improvement targets. While the plan indicates a deadline date for planned actions, it does not provide enough interim targets or dates to enable the college to measure the impact of its actions, make rapid amendments and celebrate successes. The result is that it is not clear how progress can be monitored effectively or how actions and intended outcomes will be judged as achieved.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that action planning is based on accurate and reliable data. Implement appropriate ways of ensuring that governors understand learners' day-to-day experiences in college.
- Urgently revise the action plan. Ensure that it identifies clearly the standards against which improvements can be measured. Make improvements and actions clear and specific, focusing on the impact rather than processes.
- Measure improvement regularly, and scrutinise closely the actions taken to be assured that progress is proceeding at a swift rate. Where necessary, quickly change or amend actions that are not working and celebrate those that are successful.
- Clarify the timescales for when intended improvement outcomes are to be completed. Relate the judgements about progress to date explicitly to the actions planned.
- Produce a revised data dashboard of key evidence, including baseline data, which clearly measures and shows the impact of the college's actions. Use the data to monitor regularly and communicate to governors, internal staff and external agencies progress in driving forward improvements.

## **What has been done to address the administrative errors relating to safeguarding procedures?**

Safeguarding was judged effective at the last inspection. However, minor administrative errors were identified in the maintenance of the single central record. These particularly related to the whereabouts of new staff and the recording of information regarding the interim authorisation for individuals to start work with learners prior to final clearance. Managers have dealt with this issue effectively and a new procedure and recording method are now in use.

### **Priority for improvement**

- Monitor and review procedures relating to safeguarding to ensure that they meet statutory requirements.

## **To what extent have leaders and managers addressed the need to fully implement the requirements of the study programme?**

Leaders and managers have identified the improvements required to meet the requirements of the study programme. The visit reviewed the improvement plans for work experience and impartial careers guidance. Other improvements will be considered at the next visit.

Governors had been made aware of the study programme in the time leading up to the recent inspection but had not been fully aware of the importance of meeting the requirements.

Leaders and managers have specified an improvement to extend work experience opportunities for all learners aged 16 to 19 with an intended outcome that the majority will participate in an external work experience placement.

A baseline measure of the intended participation rate in external work experience for 2014/15 has not been identified in the improvement plan. The actions described do not include how individual subject areas are to be measured and specific targets set for improvement. The intended outcome refers to a majority of the learners participating in relevant external work experience; this objective is not appropriate, as to fulfil the requirements of the study programme all learners are required to participate. Managers have not yet established what the minimum entitlement for work experience is for each learner, depending on their programme of study.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that governors are fully aware of the study programme requirements and the progress leaders and managers are making towards implementing them fully.

- Establish the minimum entitlement for work experience for each learner in relation to their programme of study. Record these clearly on learners' plans stored on the college's electronic monitoring system.
- Specify clearly the standards expected for work experience, and ensure that the quality is monitored as well as length of time and number of placements.
- Ensure that learners reflect on their work experience and how they have benefited, and use this knowledge to prepare them for their future beyond college. Make sure that they record these reflections in their learning plan.
- Clearly state in the post-inspection action plan the proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who participated in external work experience during 2014/15.
- Specify an action to identify the proportion participating in work experience by subject area, and to set and monitor targets for participation by subject areas.
- Adjust the intended outcome so that it applies to all learners, not just a majority, to reflect the requirements of the study programme.

The improvement objective to further develop high-quality impartial careers guidance lacks a measure and is not specific enough. The key role of tutors and tutorials is not stated clearly enough in the actions. For example, the plan does not make clear how managers will monitor the effectiveness of the tutorial programme in preparing learners for their next steps, or how they will ensure that all learners benefit from the allocated two hours each week of in-class time.

The intended outcome measures for destinations are too general; for example, the target states that a significant majority of learners aged 16 to 19 should progress to the next stage of education, training and employment. The target does not specify clearly the learners' actual destinations after leaving college. No measure for destinations is included in the college's key performance indicators report.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that a specific baseline entitlement for careers guidance is incorporated in the post-inspection action plan.
- Introduce more measurable actions in relation to careers guidance, and include an action to continue individual guidance through tutorials and other one-to-one sessions with staff as well as with careers advisers.
- Review the impact of careers advisers and planned advice and guidance events to ensure that learners are fully aware of all their options on leaving college. Make sure that each learner has an appropriate personal statement of their skills and personal strengths in order to gain relevant places at higher education institutions, apprenticeships or employment when leaving college.

- Link the impact of information, advice and guidance on learner destinations; ensure that destinations are collated and recorded in an informative way and reported to senior leaders and governors.

### **What has been done to improve the rigour in monitoring underperforming programme areas?**

A scheduled programme of subject reviews, to look at each area in depth, is planned for the academic year and is due to start the week after the visit. The data dashboards provide detailed data through which managers can review the progress of learners' attendance, retention and achievement. However, the dashboards do not provide an analysis of the proportion of learners achieving high grades at teacher, course and subject level, which would enable managers to monitor added value. The data is used by managers at fortnightly review meetings with senior leaders to monitor performance in underperforming subjects.

The college's managers have identified four subjects as significantly underperforming: early years, health and social care, English and mathematics, and apprenticeships for learners aged 16 to 18. The dashboard indicates at this early stage that actions taken are not having the intended outcome. For example, attendance rates in English and mathematics lessons are 82% and 80% respectively, considerably lower than the college's target of 95%. The dashboard does not include a comparator for attendance in 2014/15. In retention, the data compare in-year figures to the end-of-year figure for the last academic year; this is not an appropriate comparator. Managers need to ensure that the respective in-year data figures are used to demonstrate impact.

Individual learners are set aspirational targets at the start of their courses, which are recorded and monitored on the college's online electronic system. Learners make good use of the electronic system to monitor their own progress, including attendance and interim targets for achievement of different units. Learners' personal long- and short-term targets are not always sufficiently specific to enable them to review their progress and achieve their goals. Tutors do not always amend the aspirational targets when learners achieve above this grade. Data regarding learners' progress in completing homework and preparing for externally examined units are not included in the electronic tracking system. Consequently, there is very little evidence for these learners regarding their progress in term one.

Leaders and managers have not established with teachers consistent policies for assessment and homework, leading to variations in practice which do not benefit learners. For example, some mathematics learners had not been set any formal homework at the time of the inspection and teachers had not marked any work in learners' books.

## **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that data dashboards record value added data for learners, and also the proportion achieving high grades at a teacher, course and subject level.
- Set expectations for learners to a high standard and ensure that staff apply a consistent approach to assessment and the setting of homework. Include data regarding learners' progress in completing homework and preparing for their external tests in the online tracking system.
- Monitor closely the achievement of high grades so that managers are aware of the progress of different groups of learners and the value added by their courses.
- Ensure that the aspirational targets set for learners are amended when they achieve above this grade.
- Ensure that all learners have specific and detailed personal long- and short-term targets so that they and their teachers can monitor and review progress towards achieving aspirational end-of-course goals.

## **What actions are managers taking to ensure that learners make good progress towards achieving their learning goals?**

Managers carry out checks to ensure that staff are consistently complying with the requirements of the new electronic monitoring system. All staff have taken part in professional development to provide them with a basic understanding of how the new system works and how it supports learning, including learners' awareness of their own progress and what they need to do to improve.

Staff are not yet all using the system consistently across all programmes, particularly to identify learners who are at risk of leaving college or of not achieving their target grades, so that prompt and effective action can be taken.

## **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that the aspirational target grades set are challenging; that lessons and assignments provide the opportunity for all learners to achieve high grades and thus embed a culture of high aspiration throughout the college.
- Provide further staff development training to ensure that teachers use the system consistently across all programmes, particularly to identify learners who need immediate support to complete their courses and achieve.
- Carry out frequent and regular audits to establish that staff are using the system in the manner specified and expected. Identify which staff need further training and complete this as soon as possible.

## **What progress has the college made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?**

Teachers have benefited from professional development events and weekly sharing of good practice events such as 'lunch and learn'. Advanced practitioners now support all tutors in the development of effective teaching practices, including those identified by managers through lesson observations and walk-through observations. All tutors new to the college complete a series of induction training events to support the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Not enough sharing of good practice takes place yet between subject areas. Managers do not review the effectiveness of teaching methods quickly enough to ensure that they have enough positive impact on learning, for example, the use of appropriate starter activities and how to ensure that all learners are engaged and learning when completing group work.

Managers have introduced a minimum expected standards campaign to improve the ethos and culture of the college. Learners' behaviour is generally good, although a few learners arrive late, and in most theory lessons a few learners wear their coats in class. In practical lessons, learners observe good professional standards and practice, are engaged and are keen to learn. In sport, teachers usefully mix theory and practical work so that learners understand the relevance of their classroom activities.

In too many theory lessons, activities are not sufficiently challenging; learners lose interest or cannot see the purpose of what they are doing.

Learners spend too much lesson time completing assignment work and do not always receive enough relevant background learning before the tasks are issued. The work is completed at too slow a pace and is not always of a high enough standard. During these lessons, learners become distracted and start to chat; teachers occasionally struggle to keep learners on task, or are unable to manage a group plenary session without learners shouting out answers. As a result, teachers' use of questioning to develop learners' understanding is ineffective.

The teaching of mathematics requires significant improvement straight away. A new manager of mathematics and several new teaching staff have not yet been able to make the required improvement to the quality of teaching. The mathematical ability of learners varies widely within classes. Several second-year learners had only just missed achieving a grade C in GCSE mathematics at school; in their view they have 'gone backwards', having received a lower score in their GCSE resit this summer than when they sat the examination originally. Attendance at discrete mathematics lessons is poor. Mathematics teachers are not yet working as a team; they each use different resources and these vary in quality significantly. In most lessons, learners all complete the same activities; some find the tasks too hard and so struggle to understand the mathematical concepts, while others find them too easy and sit for lengths of time with very little to do.



The quality of assessment is inconsistent. In a few subjects, teachers check learners' written work in some detail, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, and provide effective support for improvement. In other lessons, teachers do not check the quality of their learners' written work. Teachers accept one-word answers to questions that require a more detailed response. Too few learners make notes. Learners on many courses use the virtual learning environment on many courses to support their learning in and outside lessons.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Promote more sharing of good practice by teachers between subject areas; ensure that managers review teaching methods promptly to make sure learners make good progress.
- Set and demand high standards for punctuality and positive attitudes to work, including not wearing coats in class.
- Ensure that class activities are: appropriate to learners' individual learning needs; challenging, to maintain learners' interest and motivation; clear on their purpose; and that this is understood by all learners.
- Provide ample background learning to enable learners to develop independence so they are able to complete assignments to a high standard. Ensure that lessons are delivered at a good pace and learners stay on task.
- Promote classroom behaviour which enables learners to listen and participate in plenaries without shouting out, enabling teachers to question learners more successfully and thus deepen their understanding.
- Improve the teaching of mathematics straight away. Reorganise mathematics lessons where they create barriers to attendance and punctuality, and ensure that all learners make progress in developing their mathematics skills.
- Promote more teamwork amongst mathematics teachers so that resources and good practice are shared.

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