North Shropshire College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	130797
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to North Shropshire College following publication of the inspection report on 25 February 2016 which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness and for the effectiveness of leadership and management, and to require improvement for each of the key judgements: the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; personal behaviour, development and welfare; and outcomes for learners. All provision types inspected were judged as requiring improvement, with the exception of adult learning programmes which were judged as good.

At the time of the monitoring visit the Principal was undertaking a restructure and reduction of the senior management team to make cost efficiencies. Governors were due to agree and sign off the post-inspection action plan on 11 April 2016.

Themes

The fitness for purpose of the post-inspection action plan; reporting arrangements; rigour of senior leaders' and governors' scrutiny

The post-inspection action plan which was produced shortly after the inspection encapsulates the areas needing further improvement from the most recent inspection report in the form of 17 'references to the issues'. These include finance, safeguarding, governance and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Leaders have engaged with a number of external organisations to assist in the production of the post-inspection action plan. Governors, managers and staff were engaged in this process. Leaders and managers have made an initial assessment of progress to date. This is too generous because it considers whether actions have been taken rather than quantifying progress made and the impact of actions on learners. Some aspects of the plan lack detail; the timescales and milestones identified are too vague. The plan does not include interim success criteria or milestones that would help leaders to monitor progress over time; timescales for monitoring are not specified.

The plan does not make reference to the performance management of teachers or the range of measures to be used by managers to do this beyond lesson observation grades. Although the plan refers to modifications to the tutorial programme, it does not adequately explain how managers will ensure consistency and compliance in delivery so that all learners receive high-quality information regarding all aspects of safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. Resources necessary to implement the plan are not specifically detailed to include costs and time.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:
■ adjust the post-inspection action plan to include specific details such as timescales, costs, monitoring dates, interim success criteria and milestones
■ ensure that progress reports from the post-inspection action plan include specific measures, demonstrating the impact of actions taken on the quality of provision for learners over time
■ adjust the post-inspection action plan to include actions relating to the consistency and compliance of the delivery of tutorials, to ensure that all learners receive high-quality information about safeguarding and 'Prevent'
■ ensure that the post-inspection action plan clarifies the measures to be used by managers in the performance management of teachers with respect to learning in all settings and over time.

The effectiveness of safeguarding, including a review of all aspects of safeguarding arrangements, to ensure that they are robust and prioritise the safety and welfare of young people and adults, and that they meet statutory requirements

At the previous inspection, inspectors judged the arrangements for safeguarding as ineffective. They identified a number of poor safeguarding practices. Procedures to ensure that all young people and vulnerable adults are safe were not implemented consistently or to an appropriate standard. Records detailing actions taken to keep learners safe were incomplete and did not provide sufficient assurance that information relevant to the safety of vulnerable learners was collected or shared appropriately.

Inspectors found that leaders and managers had not ensured that learners had an appropriate understanding of the dangers associated with online grooming, cyber bullying, and radicalisation and extremism, or how to protect themselves when using social media or the internet. Most staff had completed a basic formal qualification to raise awareness of the dangers posed to learners from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders and governors had completed more in-depth 'Prevent duty' training. A cross-college 'Prevent' policy and associated action plan had been recently developed, but it was too soon for inspectors to judge their impact on learners.

Since the inspection, leaders have very quickly instigated an external independent review of safeguarding systems and processes. The review identified a number of strengths and recommendations for improvement; for example, ensuring that the single central register was up to date and complied with safer recruitment expectations, and ensuring that all staff understood the requirements of reporting safeguarding concerns regarding learners, and who to alert. Leaders have arranged a follow-up visit to review the progress made by managers and staff.

Leaders and managers have undertaken a number of actions to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding. They have ensured that all recently appointed staff have a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and two pre-employment references. However, the single central register is incomplete in other respects especially for staff of long standing, for example in relation to previous pre-employment references and evidence of qualifications.

Managers have introduced a new online system for monitoring the most vulnerable learners. However, the summary document of the new system, which leaders and managers use to provide an overview of current safeguarding issues, does not record the progress or the outcome of each incident, or details of the information shared between external agencies and college staff. Relevant college staff now meet regularly to monitor safeguarding incidents and to agree and prioritise support actions to be taken for each learner.

Since the inspection, managers have planned to reinforce learners' knowledge of e-safety and fundamental British values through tutorial sessions, following more staff training. Managers have conducted some checks of learners' understanding but a significant number of learners have not been involved in these checks and they are not clear whether teachers have actually delivered the training intended. Managers have identified two topics where many learners still have insufficient understanding – identifying 'spoof websites' and sending money safely using the internet. Managers have planned further training to plug these gaps in knowledge.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:
- ensure that the new safeguarding system is followed meticulously; and that managers record accurately and fully the information shared with other agencies and college staff, the actions taken and the progress and outcomes as a result of interventions
- follow up immediately all gaps in records of staff pre-employment checks so that records are complete
- review the tutorial delivery of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, and adopt the appropriate actions to ensure that all learners gain a good understanding of relevant issues
- ensure that all staff understand the requirements of reporting safeguarding incidents and know who to alert
- provide learners with additional training to ensure that they have a better understanding of how to identify 'spoof websites' and how to send money safely using the internet
- visit a good or better general further education college to identify the best practice in ensuring that all staff and learners have a good understanding of safeguarding practices and procedures and in ensuring the safety of all learners.

The effectiveness of governance, including governors' attendance at key sub-committees, their increased scrutiny supporting timely decision making at meetings; and the extent to which board members hold senior leaders and managers to account for the accuracy of self-assessment, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and their impact on outcomes

At the most recent inspection, inspectors judged that governors, leaders and managers had failed to secure sufficiently rapid improvements for learners in the quality of education that they received since the two previous inspections; standards varied too much by course, programme type and setting. Governors had recognised the need to make changes to help them hold senior managers to more robust account and had increased the level of scrutiny and challenge of teaching and learning. Governors' attendance at the main board meetings was above the target set by the corporation. However, attendance at the quality and standards committee was too low. Governors had a better understanding of what the college did well and the areas of continued underperformance, but over half of the key targets set for the college in 2014/15 were not achieved.

Since the previous inspection, governors have reviewed the committee structure and agreed to hold more frequent meetings of the full governing body. Attendance is being monitored closely to ensure that all governors are well informed and play a full part in the scrutiny of the college's performance and key decisions, rather than rely on many sub-committees.

The full governing body now meets monthly and considers a wide range of performance indicators relating to the quality of learners' experience and outcomes. Governors bring a range of skills to the governing body and recent and planned training is helping to develop these skills further to enable them to challenge college managers better.

A link with a successful college is enabling support for safeguarding arrangements, the development of governance and improvements in teaching and learning. Individual governors with identified training needs have either attended, or are planning to attend, relevant courses. The governor responsible for safeguarding has stepped down from this role, and a different governor has taken the responsibility. They have undergone initial training and further training is planned, and they plan to meet the head of student services each month to ensure that they have a good overview of the safeguarding arrangements and incidents at the college.

A consultant with a background in quality and standards in further education has been appointed to help ensure that the board takes a realistic view of progress made.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:
■ clarify precisely how governors will monitor the post-inspection action plan so that they can accurately judge progress using measurable criteria to hold managers to

account for the improvements in the provision for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

- ensure that the safeguarding governor regularly meets the head of student services to scrutinise the details regarding learner safeguarding incidents; to assess the risks and to ask pertinent questions regarding the support offered by staff to ensure that learners are safe
- increase the focus in minutes of governors' meetings on actions agreed with timeframes, and follow up assiduously in ongoing meetings to ensure that all actions for improvement are carried out effectively and in a timely manner
- enable governors to continue to challenge college managers to develop a strong culture of continuous improvement that brings about rapid improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and an improvement in outcomes for learners.

The attendance of staff at continuing professional development sessions and the impact of these sessions on the rapid improvements required in teaching, learning and assessment

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified that most teachers were offered the training and development they needed, but their attendance at twilight training sessions had been too low. Teaching and learning had not improved consistently or quickly enough.

Managers responded quickly to the need to improve the continuing professional development of college staff. Immediately after the inspection, managers devised and implemented a compulsory training programme for all teachers. As yet, it is too early to assess the impact of this work on the quality of teaching and learning across the college.

Training sessions are delivered at different times on all sites to enable all staff to attend. Themes were selected from those identified in the inspection report, in areas such as higher-order questioning, effective written feedback on learners' work, developing English skills in vocational lessons, and injecting pace into classroom teaching. Staff feedback on the six sessions delivered to date is very positive, showing teachers' willingness to respond to the training and that they value the opportunity to develop their skills further. A range of useful resources and links, including the materials from the training sessions, is available for teachers via the staff intranet.

Managers have conducted a small number of learning walks which suggest that teachers are responding positively to the training, and further learning walks are planned for early next term. Where managers have identified individual teachers in need of particular support, individual advice and guidance have been given and regular follow-up learning walks are carried out.

Leaders have planned further training sessions for next term. The topics include 'having high expectations of learners', 'using information learning technology (ILT) in

learning and assessment' and 'using a variety of assessment methods'. In addition, more intensive training is planned for the end of the summer term.

Leaders have appointed a lead practitioner for ILT, together with two additional ILT champions. Their work is helping to develop the use of ILT but the strategy is in its very early stages.

Priorities for improvement

Managers must:
- ensure that where pockets of weaker teaching practice exist, those teachers are targeted with intensive support and training to rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and to ensure that all learners receive good or better learning experiences
- ensure that training for teachers in the development of learners' mathematics skills is included in the training programme well before the summer examinations
- develop a wider range of management strategies beyond lesson observation to ensure that teachers are using all aspects of training effectively, including, for example, the quality of written feedback on learners' work
- develop a comprehensive ILT strategy, and monitor and evaluate its implementation to ensure that teachers use ILT effectively to further develop learners' skills and ensure that they reach their potential
- visit a good or better general further education college to identify best practice in the promotion and development of teachers' teaching and assessment skills.

The improvements in the quality of the GCSE English and mathematics provision

At the previous inspection, inspectors judged that despite a marked improvement over the previous year and a considerable improvement in attendance at GCSE English and mathematics classes, only a minority of learners on study programmes who worked towards a GCSE grade C or above in English or mathematics were successful; and too few adult learners gained a mathematics GCSE at grade C or above.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have undertaken a number of planned actions aimed to improve the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills and to increase the GCSE A* to C achievement rates.

Prior to the previous inspection, managers had produced an English and mathematics teaching and learning strategy, which is being used by staff to promote the importance of learners' skills development in all learning settings. However, the strategy does not focus sufficiently on the bridging of the skills that learners require to make the transition successfully from functional skills qualifications to GCSE.

Teachers have undertaken training in the development of learners' English skills in all subjects and not just in English classes. Managers are aware of the teachers within

subject areas that are using this training well to develop further their learners' English skills. However, they have not tackled the teachers in the subject areas that are not using this training sufficiently to develop their learners' skills. Managers have not yet planned training for teachers in the development of learners' mathematical skills.

Managers have recently undertaken joint learning walks with an external consultant, aimed to improve the quality and consistency of the judgements made when observing teaching, learning and assessment. They have not yet received training in how to assess how well teachers develop learners' English and mathematics skills in all learning settings.

Leaders have introduced a new online tracking system to monitor and measure the progress made by learners from their starting points in English and mathematics. Managers are beginning to use these data to inform support interventions to ensure that learners reach their potential, but they are not yet being used consistently to support all learners.

Leaders and managers have been proactive in ensuring that learners attend all of their study programme classes, including English and mathematics. As a result, the considerable improvements in attendance seen at the inspection have been sustained.

Managers have introduced appropriate activities to assess the starting points of each learner in English and mathematics. They have begun to undertake quality checks to ensure that teachers are using this information well to inform the planning of teaching and learning, but not all teachers have been included in the checks. Learners do not receive this information due to the limited access to computers in the college and they are not fully aware of their strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. In addition, managers do not know if all teachers use this information when negotiating improvement targets with learners.

Managers have made changes to cross-college timetables to ensure that English and mathematics classes are prioritised and take place at appropriate times to maximise learning opportunities; and to ensure that learners do not miss classes or examinations due to work experience commitments. English and mathematics examinations have been relocated to ensure that learners have no difficulty with travel arrangements and are able to attend.

Managers have identified the English and mathematics GCSE A* to C achievement in each subject area but they do not use this information sufficiently to engage subject area managers in discussions regarding improvements, or to develop action plans that improve learners' progress and achievement.

Although leaders are confident that these actions will result in improvements in the quality of teaching in English and mathematics, too many of the actions are in the early stages of implementation and require urgent further development. As a result, it is too early to show the impact of these actions on learners' skills development and on

the number of learners that achieve GCSE English and mathematics at grade C or above.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:
- ensure that all observers of teaching, learning and assessment receive additional training in how to assess how well teachers develop learners' English and mathematics skills in all learning settings
- use the new online tracking systems to monitor and measure the progress made by learners from their starting points in English and mathematics and use this information to inform improvement inventions to ensure that all learners reach their potential
- equip teachers with the skills they need to use the information provided by the assessment of learners' starting points effectively to plan teaching, learning and assessment
- provide learners with information on the strengths and weaknesses that result from the assessment of their starting points in literacy and numeracy and ensure that teachers engage learners in the negotiation and setting of improvement targets
- develop a thorough process for ensuring that staff in all subject areas use their training to develop learners' English and mathematics skills
- equip all teachers with the skills they need to develop learners' mathematical skills in vocational lessons
- adjust the English and mathematics strategy to include the development of learners' skills to enable successful transition from functional skills to GCSE
- engage subject area managers in discussions regarding the actions to be taken to improve learners' progress and achievement; develop action plans and use them to measure and monitor the progress that learners make in English and mathematics
- visit a good or better general further education college to identify best practice in the promotion and development of learners' English and mathematics skills.