

Totton College

Follow up re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection monitoring visit to Totton College following publication of the inspection report on 15 June 2015 which found the provider to be inadequate overall. Totton College is a medium-sized sixth form college, although it has now ceased its A-level provision in order to focus solely on vocational education, including a substantial apprenticeship programme.

Themes

Strengthening leadership and management and ensuring effective governance and oversight of the college

My main concern following my first visit to the college in July was the quality of leadership and management. Senior leaders have worked very productively over the summer, since my previous visit, to strengthen the leadership and management of the college. They have ensured that they, and all the staff, have been in a position to enable students enrolling at the college in September (and those returning for their second year) to receive high-quality induction and learning.

While no major restructuring has taken place so far, the roles and responsibilities of senior managers at the college have been redefined, sensibly in my judgement, to ensure a strong focus on improving the quality of provision, especially teaching, learning and assessment. The slimmed-down leadership team work well together and share a clear pride and passion for wanting to improve provision at the college. Reductions in some teaching teams have been handled sensitively, as has the need to redefine the roles of some staff who now find themselves under-utilised.

The senior leadership team has been usefully supplemented by a number of external appointments, some of which are temporary and others permanent. These new staff members have helped considerably in managing change and introducing new ways of working and policies and procedures. Managers and staff are implementing a number of improvement strategies, focusing on areas such as quality, curriculum and human resources, with progress updated fortnightly against agreed targets.

This positive approach to the considerable challenges facing senior leaders this year, and particularly this term, has been aided by better-than-expected student outcomes for 2014/15. Provisional overall success rates still require improvement; they were adversely affected by the low success rates on functional skills mathematics courses at levels 1 and 2. Conversely, functional skills success rates at entry level are high.

Achievement rates for all vocational courses are very high, as is the added value for students on courses at level 3. A significant number of students in subject areas such

as sport and public services achieve high grades in their studies, many of them at distinction level. High grades in English and mathematics at GCSE, while requiring further improvement, are encouraging at 40% and 49%, respectively.

Student enrolments for 2015/16 have, perhaps understandably, declined from 2014/15, but not to the extent predicted, and it is heartening to see that so many students and their parents or carers from the local community remain loyal to the college. Class sizes are inevitably small, but senior leaders have taken a number of sensible and pragmatic decisions about what courses will, or will not, continue to run. In making these decisions, due consideration has been given to meeting local skills' needs. The intention is also to grow apprenticeships and full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-old students, and possibly to introduce traineeships; all of these actions would fit well with the need to provide skills training for the local community and the desire to become a 'careers college'.

Governance is stable and it is pleasing to note the appointment of a proactive and highly visible vice-chairman for the corporation since my previous visit. However, vacancies exist for both parent and student governors. The membership of the corporation now stands at only nine governors, although the board remains quorate.

Significant improvement for learners

Implementing a post-inspection action plan and any other improvement plans which identify the key actions and targets to improve teaching, learning and assessment

Significant progress has been made since my previous visit to write and implement a post-inspection action plan. Key priorities are based on the inspection report and supplemented by other actions that senior leaders identify as requiring improvement. The post-inspection action plan is detailed, concise and manageable as a working document and it should prove easy for managers to continue to monitor the actions set within it and their impact.

My judgement is that the post-inspection action plan contains actions most likely to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and timescales that are realistic and achievable, but also challenging. The section on progress in improving work-based learning provision requires further updates. It is clear that senior leaders are monitoring the post-inspection action plan on a regular basis and it is encouraging to see that a number of improvement actions have already been completed. Managers have risk-assessed all study programmes for students aged 16 to 18 based on outcomes in 2014/15, their value-added scores (where applicable) and teachers' levels of experience.

Significant improvement for learners

Bringing about rapid improvements in teaching and learning, including through better staff training and more effective quality assurance arrangements

Managers are clearly focusing all their efforts on improving teaching, learning and assessment, particularly those aspects that inspectors highlighted as requiring most attention at the inspection in June. However, it is too early to assess the full impact of the various changes to policies and procedures and the staff training undertaken.

Managers have revised the lesson observation process to make it more developmental; they have carried out a significant number of learning walks already this term. As a result, senior managers have a well-informed and realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, and the impact of the staff training carried out to date. Formal lesson observations begin very shortly and are being prioritised according to students' outcomes in 2014/15, and managers' findings from their ongoing monitoring of the quality of provision. The target is to increase the proportion of good and better lessons observed from 76% in 2014/15 to 85% this year.

Leaders also intend to strengthen the performance review process so that managers can be more responsive in addressing individual teachers' areas for improvement. Fortnightly one-to-one meetings between heads of faculties and curriculum leads now take place to focus specifically on teaching, learning and assessment and on reporting on the performance of students who are at risk of failure.

A significant amount of staff training has been carried out, most of which has focused on improving teaching, learning and assessment. The recent staff conference was very well received by all who attended. Work with a local outstanding college has helped managers to develop strategies to rectify particular issues regarding teaching and assessment, and to rethink their approaches to others.

The lessons I visited briefly on my learning walk were too few in number to come to any firm conclusions about standards of teaching and learning thus far this term. However, I observed encouraging signs of good progress being made by students who joined the college in September and who were able to express to me what they had learned to date. The smaller class sizes enable teachers to give students a lot of individual attention. The learners I spoke to are all enthusiastic and positive about their experiences at the college so far and have already formed good relationships with their teachers. Students were all interested in the topics taught and clearly want to learn.

Reasonable improvement for learners

Improving the monitoring and tracking of apprentices' progress

This visit was very useful in enabling me to find out why so few apprentices complete their training in a timely fashion, despite success rates overall being high. Issues have clearly existed both within the subcontracted and direct delivery provision that have led to this very stark contrast between overall and timely success rates for apprentices.

Relationships with one large subcontractor have clearly contributed to the problems encountered, but steps are now being taken to remove these apprentices from the college individualised learner record and attribute them to the subcontractor, with the funding agency involved in a mediation role. This also goes part way to allaying concerns about how this provision, delivered largely elsewhere in the country by the subcontractor, is contributing to the college's strategic curriculum priorities. Processes for working with other existing and new subcontractors are now more rigorous.

The other main change, implemented prior to the inspection, has been to move the work-based learning team centrally within the college, under the director for workforce skills and two work-based learning co-ordinators. This move is enabling a much greater sense of 'ownership' by the management team of the apprenticeship programmes, better teamwork and a realisation that timely completion is important for apprentices and can directly affect their progression and careers.

Regular staff training has been introduced, for example, on equality and diversity, the Prevent agenda and target-setting within apprenticeship programmes. The director now attends heads of faculty meetings to ensure that input in discussions relevant to apprenticeship provision. Staff's planning, teaching and assessment of functional skills are improving and there is better sharing of good practice. Most importantly, managers have implemented an 'apprenticeship tracker' to monitor students' progress individually; assessors now have to produce regular progress reports on their 'caseloads' of apprentices. However, at this stage, it is too early to judge the impact of these new, or relatively new, initiatives on timely completions.

Reasonable improvement for learners

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