

# Mid Cheshire College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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**Name of lead inspector:** Steve Hailstone HMI

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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 following publication of the inspection report on 3 March 2016 which found the college to be inadequate overall. At the inspection, outcomes for learners, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development behaviour and welfare, and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Inspectors graded three provision types; 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes were judged to be inadequate and apprenticeships were judged to be good.

This first monitoring visit focused on the improvement action plan, improving outcomes for learners, meeting the requirements of study programmes, quality assurance, governance and safeguarding.

### **Themes**

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

Leaders and managers have produced a detailed action plan to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. However, the action plan is overambitious, with 50 actions listed, most of which have completion dates within the next three months. The action plan does not indicate which actions should be prioritised in terms of urgency. Actions that could be achieved quickly often have long timescales. For example, one action is for senior leaders to hold briefing meetings with staff on their expectations of staff performance, but the target date is the end of April 2016, three months after the last inspection. Other actions that require longer-term solutions have timescales that are too short.

Many of the actions in the plan relate to increasing the volume of activity but make no reference to improvements in quality. For example, one action is that all learners will receive three career guidance sessions annually, but the plan does not indicate how leaders and managers will ensure that all learners receive high-quality career guidance that is responsive to their individual needs. In many cases, it is unclear how proposed actions will result in the intended actions.

Leaders and managers frequently monitor progress against the specific actions in the plan. However, they do not evaluate overall progress against the six overarching strategic actions that link directly to the recommendations in the last inspection report. Some completion dates for actions have already passed without the action having been completed. For example, the target date of April 2016 has been missed for producing a report on progress in reducing the number of learners at risk of not achieving their qualifications in English and mathematics.

## Priorities for improvement

- Rewrite the action plan urgently. Ensure that the revised version:
  - includes appropriate target dates for completion of actions, with longer timescales for actions that require significant work and shorter timescales for those that can be achieved quickly
  - prioritises actions in terms of their urgency
  - clearly and accurately indicates how achieving an action will lead to the intended outcome
  - includes outcomes that indicate specific improvements in quality as well as the volume of activity.
- Ensure that all actions are achieved within the proposed timescales and evaluate the impact of the actions on addressing weaknesses identified at the last inspection.
- Produce regular reviews of progress against the six strategic actions in the plan and use these to provide clear reports for governors, managers and staff on the college's progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection.

### **How successfully are leaders and managers taking action to ensure that current learners make good progress and achieve their potential?**

College data indicates that there has been an increase in recent months in the proportion of learners who are on target to achieve or exceed their target grade. However, the proportion is still too low, with almost a half of learners on study programmes progressing too slowly to achieve their targets. Actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have had insufficient impact on improving learners' progress.

Managers make insufficient use of the college's system for monitoring learners' progress to identify actions for improvement. Data produced by the system is often incomplete, and managers do not receive reports on learners' progress in their curriculum areas that would enable them to improve standards and outcomes for learners.

Learners' progress is impeded further by poor attendance across much of the provision, particularly in English and mathematics lessons. Managers and teachers take insufficient action to tackle low attendance. Actions identified to improve attendance in the post-inspection action plan have not yet had an impact.

## Priorities for improvement

- Improve the use of the college's system for monitoring learners' progress by:
  - ensuring that the data on the system is complete
  - providing regular reports for managers that clearly and accurately indicate the progress that learners are making towards their targets.

- Improve learners' progress by using accurate data to target courses where intervention is needed, and taking effective action to improve quickly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in these areas.
- Take swift action to improve attendance by:
  - communicating expectations about attendance clearly to learners
  - identifying learners who miss too many lessons and providing effective support to improve their attendance
  - re-drafting the actions around attendance in the post-inspection action plan to indicate precisely what managers and teachers will do to improve attendance.

### **What early action has been taken to ensure that the college fully meets the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes, and how effective has it been?**

Too many learners do not have work experience planned as part of their study programme. Leaders and managers have increased significantly the number of learners on study programmes who carry out work experience placements, but only a third of learners have either completed or secured placements. The planning of work experience is weak, and too many learners are withdrawn from lessons in order to attend their placements. This disrupts learning as a few learners miss lessons over several weeks while they are on their placements.

The development of learners' English and mathematics skills on study programmes remains weak. The proportion of learners who achieved high grades in GCSE English and mathematics in 2014/15 was very low. Current learners are making slow progress in improving their skills as a result of a lack of interesting and challenging teaching and learning in English and mathematics lessons and insufficient focus on improving learners' skills in vocational lessons.

Managers have taken action to increase the volume of careers guidance that learners receive, but have not put in place any actions to improve its quality. All learners receive the same volume of careers guidance, irrespective of their future plans and the level of support and guidance that they need.

The timetabling of study programmes is weak. Learners are required to attend for three days each week unless they need to attend both GCSE English and mathematics lessons. Where this is the case, learners are required to come in for a fourth day when their only timetabled lessons are in English and/or mathematics. Too many learners decide not to attend for the fourth day, which results in low attendance in English and mathematics lessons and poor progress.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- Ensure that all learners on study programmes benefit from high-quality work experience placements during the current academic year.

- Plan work experience placements so that they do not disrupt learning and do not result in learners missing other essential elements of their study programme.
- Revise the study programme timetable so that it does not lead to learners persistently failing to attend essential parts of their study programme.
- Quickly improve the quality of teaching and learning on English and mathematics courses.
- Improve teachers' skills in developing learners' English and mathematics skills on vocational courses.
- Identify and provide careers guidance and support that meet each learner's needs.

### **What progress have leaders and managers made in strengthening arrangements to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?**

Leaders and managers have put in place a revised performance management process to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers whose performance is evaluated as less than good follow a formal improvement plan with targets for improvement and actions that include relevant support and training. In too many of the improvement plans, targets are insufficiently specific about the aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that teachers need to improve. Non-compliance with agreed college systems and procedures such as regular updating of the learner monitoring system remains endemic in the college, and a minority of teachers are resistant to improving their practice.

As a result of the lack of any early impact of actions to improve practice, too much teaching, learning and assessment remains weak. The college's lesson observation process indicates that around a half of the provision either requires improvement or is inadequate. During the monitoring visit, inspectors saw too much teaching that was dull and uninspiring and did not challenge learners sufficiently, too many lessons where learners only complete assessed assignments, and weak monitoring of learners' progress. In a few lessons, teachers use activities that stimulate and challenge learners well; as yet, managers have not drawn on the skills of these teachers to improve the practice of those whose performance is weak.

A culture of low expectations of learners pervades most areas of the college. Too often, teachers do not ensure that learners are prepared for learning when they arrive at lessons. Teachers do not always challenge inappropriate standards of dress in lessons, such as wearing coats and caps, or explain to learners the importance of conforming to the standards that are expected at work. The learning environment in many parts of the college is poor, with untidy classrooms, worn furniture and carpets, and a lack of care in ensuring that learners' work and other displays are presented to a high standard on classroom walls.

## **Priorities for improvement**

- Put in place improvement plans for underperforming teachers that indicate clearly which aspects of their teaching they need to improve, timescales for achievement, and the specific support that they will receive to improve their practice.
- Ensure that all staff are compliant with all college systems and procedures and quickly tackle instances where staff resist tasking action to improve their practice.
- Quickly put in place a relevant and high-quality programme of training and support for all teachers to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Ensure that the best practice in the college is shared widely.
- Immediately take action to ensure that teachers stop using lessons solely as a time for learners to complete assessed assignments.
- Set clear standards to ensure that all learners are prepared for learning and work, including the removal of coats and caps at the beginning of lessons. Monitor closely how well staff are ensuring that learners comply with the standards, and take appropriate actions to ensure compliance.
- Quickly improve the learning environment by ensuring that classrooms are tidy, furnished to an appropriate standard, and well maintained. Improve the quality of presentation of learners' work and displays on classroom walls.

## **What progress has been made in ensuring that governors have sufficiently detailed information about the college's performance so that they can hold leaders and managers to account effectively?**

Leaders and managers do not use data well to evaluate the impact of actions taken to improve the provision. As a result, the reports that governors receive about the impact of interventions provide little reliable information. Governors now receive a 'scorecard' that provides them with more detail about the college's performance than previously. However, the scorecard provides insufficient information to enable governors to hold senior leaders to account. Key indicators such as learners' progress are missing from the scorecard. Governors have not yet received any information of the impact so far of the new performance management arrangements.

Governors recognise that progress so far against actions in the post-inspection action has been too slow. They have asked leaders to prioritise actions and provide them with progress reports on those that are the highest priority, but this has not happened.

## **Priorities for improvement**

- Quickly improve the management of data so that accurate, accessible and timely reports can be produced about all aspects of the college's performance, including the progress that current learners are making.

- Ensure that governors receive accurate reports about the progress that leaders and managers are making in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and outcomes for learners.

### **What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented fully to keep staff and learners safe?**

Safeguarding remains ineffective. Senior leaders and managers, including the new temporary designated safeguarding officer (DSO), are not aware of all learners who have been identified on the learner monitoring system as being at risk. Learners are not aware of the recent change of DSO and managers are uncertain whom to approach if they have a safeguarding concern or question.

Security at the Hartford campus is weak. The site has many entrances which are not monitored, and it is impossible for staff to know if unauthorised individuals have entered the campus. Staff and learners are required to wear identity badges but not all learners comply with the requirement.

An external agency now carries out risk assessments of organisations providing work experience placements. This includes appropriate checks and on-site visits to organisations considered to be high-risk. However, college managers do not analyse information provided by the agency, and are not assured of the rigour of the risk-assessment process.

The college's information system ensures that learners are unable to access inappropriate websites. However, software has not been upgraded to ensure that searches for content relating to radicalisation and extremism are detected.

Leaders and managers have taken appropriate action to improve learners' understanding of safeguarding, including the risks of radicalisation and extremism. This includes the recent introduction of an online learning resource on safeguarding.

Fire evacuation procedures at the Winsford campus have been improved. Managers have carried out fire evacuation drills and put in place necessary improvements to ensure effective evacuation.

### **Priorities for improvement**

- As a matter of urgency, ensure that leaders, managers and staff know which learners are identified as being at risk, and that appropriate actions are in place to keep these learners safe.
- Quickly inform all staff and learners on how and to whom they should communicate safeguarding concerns. Ensure that all staff and learners are fully aware of the procedure for reporting concerns.
- Review security at the Hartford campus and take action to reduce the risk of unauthorised individuals gaining access to the college buildings.

- Closely analyse information provided by the external agency that risk assesses organisations providing work experience placements to ensure that the process is rigorous. Take action to improve the rigour if necessary.
- Upgrade computer software so that searches for content relating to radicalisation and extremism can be detected.

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