

Tech City College

First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Tech City College following publication of the inspection report on 13 April 2016 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Tech City College joined Aspirations Academies Trust in September 2015. At that time the chief executive of the trust, along with a newly appointed principal and governing body, took over the leadership of the college.

Most students are on level 3 study programmes in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Currently a minority of students are taking level 2 GCSE and technical qualifications.

The purpose of this visit was to establish what initial steps governors, senior leaders and managers have taken to improve provision, in response to the previous inspection, and to set key priorities for the next visit.

Themes

Provide training for teachers so they improve their teaching, marking and feedback to students and are helped to assess accurately the progress that students make.

The chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, governors and the principal have a clear grasp of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and, with the principal, have developed well-considered plans for improvement.

The principal and senior leaders have developed a range of continuing professional development (CPD) activities for staff. This includes bespoke mentoring and coaching for teaching staff, alongside peer support. These are beginning to show improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. The college's internal lesson observation process shows that the quality of teaching over time is improving and, as a result, more teaching is graded as good.

Support for teaching staff and arrangements to share best practice with other schools within the trust have been established. A number of managers including the principal visited the trust's outstanding schools to learn how they operate and how they achieved their outstanding status. The performance management is more robust and has led to two teaching staff moving on. The principal and senior leadership team have nurtured existing talent; promoting personal and professional development. Further CPD has included one-to-one coaching sessions and developmental lesson observations from external consultants. These have helped teachers develop strategies to improve teaching and learning; for example,

improving the pace of lessons and providing differentiated activities to meet the needs of individual students.

Teachers are sharing good practice through the establishment of a 'learning wall' displaying teaching and learning tips posted so all teachers are able to view the suggestions. This has enabled teachers to identify what has worked well for them and for others. They found they can adapt these techniques to their own subjects; for example, ways to encourage more discussions and debates between students. Students report that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has much improved.

The principal and senior leaders have developed quality assurance systems closely linked to a range of evidence to support improvements. As a result, the identification of students at risk of falling behind is clearer and effective strategies are introduced which support the student.

Senior leaders have made improvements to the management information system (MIS) and recruited a well-qualified manager to provide useful daily, weekly and termly performance reports. This has had a significant impact on improving the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of provision and is leading to more accurate and well-considered strategies to improve the overall effectiveness of the college, over time. All staff can now monitor the performance of individual students on different courses as a result of the availability of helpful performance data. The assessment of students' progress is much improved and monitored through a system that the college calls 'flight path'. The expectation that every student is to improve from their starting point by two grades is challenging students to work hard and exceed expectations. Students report that they now have good feedback from their teachers about their homework. They say it now, more appropriately, gives them good advice on how to improve their work. This has been a significant change for them.

The college has appointed subject course coordinators and further senior leadership team members who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Internal processes through weekly senior leadership team meetings, termly faculty course reviews and termly governors' meetings result in a more robust monitoring of provision, leading to more thorough and critical scrutiny.

Performance data is scrutinised weekly in senior leadership team meetings. Decisive and effective action taken has led to improvements to the outcomes of current students on the BTEC courses. The awarding body approved an improvement action plan in January 2016. As a result, Year 13 engineering students have completed 95% of their assignments, with 10 out of 25 having already completed 100%.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to implement strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Monitor the effectiveness of interventions to identify and support students at risk of falling behind so they achieve well.

Develop strategies to improve poor attendance.

Senior leaders have revised and simplified key quality assurance policies and strategies, enabling staff to see clear steps in processes that lead to an improved outcome for learners. All policies are accessible to staff on the college shared intranet drive. Senior leaders have introduced a rigorous and robust quality management system that ensures accountability of all staff members including the senior leadership team.

The focus on improving attendance and punctuality has been relentless. Daily attendance and punctuality checks are completed with immediate actions, such as same-day detentions. The actions taken since the previous inspection has led to good improvement in Year 12 students' attendance from 79% in March 2016 to 85% in June 2016. Of the students that are targeted to improve attendance, 71% improved their attendance and nearly 20% of these are now attending at a rate of 90% or more. Overall, the punctuality rate has improved by half a percentage point and only a small minority of students are late for lessons.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to monitor the effectiveness of the revised policies and procedures to ensure students attend college and are punctual and prepared for lessons.

Provide work experience aligned to students' courses and aspirations.

The principal and senior leaders have now developed a good range of work experience options for students. The recently recruited student services manager oversees the college's work experience strategy. Students' views are sought about their experience of work and their specific interests. Extensive outreach work to secure work experience opportunities for students has resulted in the establishment of a customer relationship database. The results have been very positive. To date, 38% of companies contacted offered a work experience placement and 47% of students have completed work experience or have part-time jobs. A further 37% have made applications for July this year and have a confirmed offer. An additional 10% are awaiting the outcome of their applications.

Senior leaders and teachers have established helpful workshops for students to complete work experience applications. Students have options to apply through their own research on their work experience placements and send off applications to the company themselves, or work with the college's arrangements. Many students already have jobs outside college and have gained good employability skills, such as communication skills, teamwork and customer service skills. Students report that work experience is much better and there are good opportunities to learn and

develop employability skills. Relevant companies visit the college and invite students to work on specific projects. These include pitching ideas for a variety of commercial enterprises. This has helped students develop confidence and good communication skills, as well as giving them useful experience of public speaking.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to expand the range of work experience opportunities and build on the innovative enterprise developments with start-up companies, through their colocation in the college.
- Routinely survey students about what work they already do outside of college and the existing skills they have gained as a result.

Provide non-qualification and enrichment activities, including the development of challenging and interesting work for students to do outside of lessons.

A wide range of enrichment activities based on useful themes relating to achieving, enjoying, participating, economic well-being and being healthy, enables students to engage in interesting, innovative and exciting learning events. A calendar of activities includes challenges both in and outside the classroom and enhances the students' learning experience as well as their personal and social development. These activities are advertised and promoted in assemblies and through notices and news bulletins. Many activities are closely linked to STEM subjects. For example, students taking a further mathematics course attended an evening course on problem solving at University College London.

The trust's portfolio project offers a wide range of opportunities for students to develop work-related skills closely aligned to their courses and interests. This has included building their communication skills and confidence through working on live briefs from a civil engineering company on re-decking Tower Bridge, the Dutch Embassy and the BAM Nuttall floating garden project in Vauxhall, and developing a robotic arm with the Maker Club. Students talked enthusiastically about the projects and proudly presented their work and the gains they had made in self-confidence and communication skills.

A good range of competitions, including one where the students competed for a trip to NASA at the end of June, has been highly motivating and exciting for students. The application process was very rigorous, as was the selection process which included writing an application form, giving a presentation on the topic given to them and attending a formal interview with three people on the panel, as well as the completion of a group task. The competition was fully funded by the college.

A good range of educational trips to science and technology laboratories and universities enrich the curriculum. Wider personal development activities, such as money management training, fitness and health activities have been particularly positive and enabled students to explore topical issues and concerns, such as mental

health and self-harm. A counsellor has been appointed to support students and promote mental health and well-being. Students are engaged in a range of fund-raising activities such as one arranged to support the charity Mind, after Year 12 and 13 students ran a whole-college event on mental health.

Wider recreational activities and sports events such as table football in the students' canteen area give students an opportunity to have fun and relax. Further informal indoor sporting equipment is being introduced.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to create innovative and exciting projects and events for students to engage in as part of the calendar of enrichment activities.
- Monitor the benefits of such activities for students to ensure that non-qualification and enrichment activities contribute positively to the development of well-rounded young people.

Provide high-quality careers advice and guidance

Students are able to access a wider range of impartial careers advice and guidance. Students benefit from tutorials that focus on their next steps, assemblies and other activities such as student services, careers and employability workshops, curriculum vitae writing and young enterprise workshops, to inform them of the progression opportunities available to them. Students complete evaluations of these events, which they rate favourably.

Career events have been an effective means of introducing students to wider career opportunities. A career and progression event which included representation from the Islington youth progression team, a range of employers and higher education providers, such as Greenwich University, took place on 15 June. Approximately 80 students attended. The event resulted in students making 23 applications to employers including 'Just IT' and BAM Nuttall. Three students signed up with the National Citizenship Service (NCS). A further four who had previously completed the NCS challenge signed up as volunteers to support this summer's events.

The college makes tremendous efforts to promote STEM subjects to young women, with a number of female students interested in careers in engineering and the sciences. The promotion of women in STEM event includes a female engineer from the British nuclear industry who spoke about her work to female students at the college in May 2016. This was rated by those who participated as excellent. Year 12 and 13 students are due to attend a digital career show in July to meet employers, businesses and training providers to find out about the range of careers and opportunities available in a wide range of industries.

Senior leaders are keen to ensure students are aware of wider routes to further learning and professional career opportunities. The introduction of a vacancy board/screen in the foyer of the college helpfully informs students of work

experience opportunities available, job vacancies, training, career events and apprenticeship opportunities.

The provision of training events and support for students when making their UCAS applications is particularly helpful and valued by students. So far this year, 93% of students applied to university. This is an increase of 50 students on last year's applications. Of these 87.5% have accepted offers. The position of the remaining students is known. Many of them are choosing other positive destinations, such as an apprenticeship with Transport for London in advanced mechanical engineering.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to make a wide variety of career options known to students to enable them to make informed decisions about their next steps based on their talent, knowledge, skills, interests and aspirations.
- Ensure that the careers advice and guidance given is recorded appropriately on students' files and can be referred to by students, their parents and carers, as appropriate.