

West Cheshire College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the fourth follow-up re-inspection monitoring visit to West Cheshire College following publication of the inspection report on 11 November 2015 which found the college 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 learners were judged to be inadequate. Personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged to require improvement. Study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 were judged to be inadequate. Adult learning provision was judged to require improvement. Apprenticeships were judged to be good.

The third monitoring visit in May 2016 found that leaders and managers had made reasonable progress in planning to address the areas for improvement identified at inspection; monitoring underperforming programme areas; implementing fully the requirements of the study programme; taking action to ensure that learners made good progress towards achieving their learning goals; improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; improving the quality of English and mathematics provision; improving the quality of additional learning support; implementing the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty.

The findings of this visit are outlined below.

Themes

What impact have actions taken by leaders and managers to improve provision had on outcomes for learners in 2015/16? **Reasonable progress**

The college's data for 2015/16 indicates that, for learners aged 16 to 18, the overall predicted achievement rate on vocational courses is similar to that for 2014/15 and is in line with the rate for all providers. A similar proportion of learners on level 2 and level 3 diplomas are expected to achieve as in 2014/15. However, the predicted achievement rate on level 1 diplomas shows a significant fall from 2014/15. For learners aged 19 and over, the predicted achievement rate on vocational courses shows a significant improvement to above the rate for similar providers. The achievement rate among learners who receive additional support increased in 2015/16. This group of learners achieved at a similar rate to their peers.

Too few learners achieved functional skills English and mathematics qualifications in 2015/16, and the proportion of learners who achieved grades A* to C in GCSE English and mathematics was low. Among 16–18-year-old learners, the achievement rate on functional skills courses was particularly low, with only a small minority achieving their qualifications.

A high proportion of apprentices completed their framework successfully within the planned time in 2015/16. The achievement rate for 16–18-year-old apprentices improved significantly and was well above the national rate.

Across most programmes, the college's achievement data for 2015/16 was almost complete and provided a reliable indication of performance. However, on level 2 vocational programmes in the building services faculty, late external verification of learners' assessed work meant that achievement data on these courses was incomplete.

What has been done to improve the rigour in monitoring underperforming programme areas? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers continue to promote actively a culture of high expectations of learners. At the beginning of the day, managers and other staff welcome learners on arrival and challenge those who are late or who arrive unprepared for study. The induction of new learners emphasises strongly the college's expectations about readiness for study, attendance and punctuality. The discernible change in the culture of the college is beginning to have a positive impact on learners' commitment to their studies and on their progress in many vocational areas.

Since the last monitoring visit, leaders and managers have maintained their close scrutiny of underperforming programme areas and have continued to put in place appropriate actions to improve performance. These include frequent meetings with course teams to identify actions to support learners who are at risk of not achieving, and more rigorous management of underperforming teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved in provision in early years and in building services, and achievement rates in these areas have increased to above the national rate.

On engineering, health and social care, and business courses, the actions that managers have taken to improve performance have not yet had sufficient impact. Too much teaching in these areas is insufficiently challenging, and achievement rates remain too low. Managers are fully aware of the issues and have identified further actions to improve quickly the quality of provision on these courses.

How well are learners improving their English, mathematics and work-related skills on 16–19 study programmes?

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have taken a number of actions to improve the development of learners' English and mathematics provision on study programmes. A new manager has been appointed with specific responsibility for English and mathematics provision. The importance of English and mathematics for learners' future aspirations is emphasised strongly at induction and at parents' evenings, and the timetabling of lessons has improved in the new academic year. However, after two weeks on the programme, a few learners are not yet aware of the classes to which they have been allocated.

Too much teaching in English and mathematics lessons does not interest or challenge learners. Too often, activities are dull and learning resources are of poor quality. In many lessons, teachers do not plan activities to meet the specific needs of learners and do not check learners' progress rigorously enough. Teachers often take insufficient action to improve the poor quality of many learners' work. Too many learners have already missed lessons in the first two weeks of their course. Leaders and managers have not acted quickly enough to ensure that learners attend English and mathematics lessons regularly and benefit from high-quality teaching that enables them to make good progress and achieve their qualifications.

Leaders and managers have acted swiftly to ensure that the development of learners' work-related skills has a high priority on study programmes. Most learners on study programmes had completed work experience placements by the end of 2015/16, and planning to ensure that all learners have relevant placements in the current year has already begun.

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers recognise the need to improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and they have increased the frequency and volume of training and development for teachers. From the beginning of this academic year, all teachers participate in professional development activities one afternoon each week. Training focuses on college priorities that include using appropriately challenging activities, the use of questioning to check and extend learning, and the development of learners' English and mathematics skills.

The actions that leaders and managers have taken to improve quality have had a positive impact in several programme areas. In many lessons, learners benefit from dynamic and challenging activities that help them to acquire new skills and knowledge quickly. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently high. In too many lessons, particularly in underperforming programme

areas, teachers do not plan learning carefully enough and activities are either too difficult for learners or not challenging enough. The assessment of learners' progress is often weak, and activities often fail to interest or inspire learners.

Leaders and managers have not targeted training sufficiently on tackling the specific weaknesses of teachers whose performance does not meet the expected standard. Intervention has not been swift enough in the first weeks of the new academic year to improve the practice of these teachers and ensure that learners on all courses make good progress. Leaders and managers recognise that they need to make further changes to accommodation used for teaching to ensure that the learning environment is appropriate.

What progress have managers made in improving the quality of additional support for learners who need extra help?

Reasonable progress

Managers have increased further the number of learning support assistants and have put in place appropriate training on providing effective support. They monitor closely the quality and impact of the work of learning support assistants, and intervene where support is not effective enough. As a result, the quality of additional support that learners receive has improved. Most learning support assistants work closely with teachers to provide constructive support for individual learners. They help learners to improve their skills and understanding through appropriate questioning, helpful guidance and clear feedback. This ensures that the majority of learners who receive extra help make progress that is in line with that of their peers. In a few instances, support does not challenge learners sufficiently to become more independent in their learning.

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