

North Shropshire College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second follow up re-inspection monitoring visit to North Shropshire College following publication of the inspection report on 25 February 2016 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

At the time of this second monitoring visit, the principal had recently left the college and an interim principal had been in post for just over a week. A restructure and reduction of the senior management team to make cost efficiencies had led to the appointment of two assistant principals, a head of learner services, a senior tutor for tutorials and four advanced practitioner tutors. All of the previous senior leadership team have left the college.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

The post-inspection action plan has been updated and now includes all of the recommendations made at the previous visit. It gives an honest and very useful account of the progress made against each of the actions taken. The senior leadership team is using the plan well to monitor and review the progress made. Governors attend fortnightly post-inspection working group meetings to discuss progress, but the information they receive does not contain enough detail to ensure that they clearly identify the amount of progress made – for example, the number of learners who have improved their skills as a result of the feedback that they have received from teachers on their written work, and the size of audit samples. More detail is required to justify the judgements that have been made in the plan.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:

- adjust the post-inspection action plan to quantify, where possible, the impact of the actions taken, to provide clear explanations of the evidence presented and to include specific details such as:
 - the amount of progress made as a result of the actions taken: for example, how many learners are working at, below or above the expected standard
 - the size of the audit samples: for example, the audit of teachers' feedback on learners' written work
 - the number of learners and staff sampled
 - justification of the judgements made in the plan.

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

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, inspectors judged the arrangements for safeguarding as ineffective. During this visit, inspectors found that leaders and managers had ensured that learners had an appropriate understanding of the dangers associated with online grooming, cyber bullying, radicalisation, extremism and how to protect themselves when using social media or the internet. Almost all of the small sample of learners spoken to during the visit were able to talk confidently about many of these subjects.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the single central register is now fully compliant with the requirements of 'Keeping children safe in education 2016' (KCSIE). The safer recruitment checks and risk assessments (where necessary) for newly appointed staff are rigorous, although the control measures listed in the risk assessments are not routinely monitored to ensure that they are effective. Managers have worked diligently to rectify the many gaps in the register identified at the previous inspection. Staff in post for fewer than five years now all have two written references as well as other appropriate checks. Almost all other longer-serving staff now have at least one reference.

Wider safeguarding arrangements are suitably thorough. Staff and learners have regular discussions about safeguarding topics, such as the 'Prevent' duty and e-safety, through the tutorial programme. Safeguarding referrals are handled appropriately and there are examples of strong inter-agency working with good communication to share details of referrals.

Safeguarding policies have been revised and are mainly fit for purpose with only a very small number of references to outdated statutory guidance, such as KCSIE 2014. Teachers cover a wide range of topics during tutorials and lessons. Learners feel safe in college and staff challenge them to ensure that they wear identity badges. A few learners who had referred safeguarding concerns to staff felt that they had been listened to and appropriate action had been taken. In one case, a learner shared their experience in a group tutorial session to help peers deepen their understanding of how college staff protect them.

Residential learners are safe on site. Staff conduct thorough risk assessments which identify any areas of concern, and actions are taken to strengthen existing systems – for example, further development of security camera systems and additional lighting for the residential accommodation blocks.

Staff make sure that evening routines for residential learners ensure their safety and well-being. Systems are regularly reviewed and have recently been developed. These include revised curfew times and the introduction of an electronic log-in system which accurately records the time each resident returns.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:

- monitor the control measures identified in the risk assessments to ensure that they are effective.

The effectiveness of governance, including governors' attendance at key 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

Reasonable progress

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 had received since the two previous inspections. Governors now frequently monitor the pre-inspection action plan in their monthly meetings of the full board. They provide sufficient challenge to the senior leadership team, drawing on more accurate and timely data on learners' progress and achievement, which they validate in discussion with curriculum managers.

Three members of the governing body of Reaseheath College have joined the board in preparation for the proposed merger, together with three observers from the college. They bring a useful fresh insight to the board. Three members of the North Shropshire board attend Reaseheath board meetings in a reciprocal arrangement. Governors are confident that they no longer tolerate the instances of complacency about the quality of education learners receive that were evident at the previous inspection. They are aware of the improvements leaders have made in establishing a more robust safeguarding culture.

Governors do not currently have a clear insight into the operation and running of residential services for learners under 18 years of age. Senior managers are aware of this and have now identified a governor to take this lead role. An initial meeting for the review of residential services with the governor's involvement has been set for December 2016.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:

- ensure that governors have a clear insight into the operation and running of residential services for learners under 18 years of age, and monitor carefully their safety, well-being and academic progress.

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

Reasonable progress

Managers have designed an extensive programme of continuous professional development (CPD) events and activities to support improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. These include how to develop learners' mathematics and English skills in all lessons, how to introduce discussion about equality, diversity and fundamental British values into lessons, an update on safeguarding, improving the use of questioning to check understanding and information learning technology (ILT) to promote independent learning.

Most of the timetabled CPD events are well attended by staff across the college. Feedback from staff shows that they find the events useful.

Managers use their regular learning walks and lesson observations to evaluate the impact of staff development and help refine the programme for the future. Their evaluation suggests that teachers are now embedding activities in many lessons to help support the development of learners' mathematics and English skills more effectively, but it is too soon to be sure that this is leading to better achievement of qualifications.

Performance management is suitably robust and is beginning to challenge staff, and particularly managers, to accept responsibility for improving the quality of their area of the college. Objectives set at the end of the annual review for teachers are relevant to the job role, but do not always include a target to measure the impact of staff development activities on the quality of teaching and learning, and on outcomes.

Curriculum area managers (CAMs) have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in the curriculum areas (CAs) that they manage. They undertake appropriate remedial actions to ensure that staff are fully compliant with college expectations. CAMs monitor carefully the rate of improvement and the progress that learners make over time. However, further actions are required to ensure that they are satisfied that the most able learners are sufficiently challenged and achieve their potential, that all learners are fully aware of their strengths and areas for improvement in English and mathematics, and that all staff use this information well to inform the planning of learning and assessment.

Managers have undertaken an audit of the quality of teachers' feedback on learners' marked work. The findings suggest that the majority of feedback is helpful to learners' progress and improvement and of a good quality. Almost all of the learners spoken to during the visit confirmed that they find teachers' feedback is helping them to improve the quality of their work. Managers have provided the teachers who were not meeting the expected standard with intensive support. As a result, most of the small cohort have improved and a few are continuing to receiving support.

Managers attended an Ofsted improvement event in July 2016. They have disseminated the information on 'how to improve the progress made by learners' to teachers during recent training events.

Managers and the advanced practitioner tutors are supporting a small cohort of staff well to improve the quality of their teaching and assessment. As a result, most are improving at the expected pace or better, and a few have been judged to deliver good lessons.

Managers have developed a new ILT strategy. The ILT manager is working on 10 projects with staff in a range of subject areas: for example, improving communications, a self-evaluation of the staff's digital skills, and improving the staff's knowledge and use of the virtual learning environment. As a result, managers can identify improvements in staff's use of software to track learners' progress, the setting of useful targets and the recording of concerns regarding learners' behaviour and achievement.

The senior tutor for tutorials has undertaken an audit of the tutorial process to ensure that staff are complying with college expectations. They use the findings well to provide staff with comprehensive feedback on the quality of target setting and the recording of essential learner information. Managers' observations of tutorials and feedback from learners during the monitoring visit suggest that learners find topics such as e-safety, how to identify predatory behaviour, and information on the use of drugs and alcohol interesting and helpful.

During the visit, inspectors spoke with 29 learners. Feedback from learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, and adults studying at levels 1, 2 and 3 across eight CAs included the following:

- Almost all learners said that they are enjoying their course.
- Around half of the learners know their strengths and areas for improvement in English and mathematics. A few are able to explain why they had not achieved a grade C in their GCSE examination and know what they need to do to improve. Too many do not have targets set to help them to improve their English and mathematics skills.
- Too many learners told us that English and mathematics classes are unhelpful and boring. However, learners studying hairdressing and forensic science said that they find their lessons link well to their subject areas.

- Most learners know their strengths and weaknesses in vocational and academic subjects. Many find that the targets set by teachers in vocational and academic subjects are helping them to improve.
- The few second-year learners told us that this year staff are stricter on the wearing of identity badges, lessons are better planned and targets are more focused and regularly reviewed by staff.
- Most find the feedback on written work helpful.

Inspectors observed that all of the learners spoken to during the visit were polite and well behaved. They interacted positively with each other.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must:

- ensure that the most-able learners are being sufficiently challenged and are on target to achieve their potential
- ensure that the objectives set at the end of the annual review for teachers are relevant to the job role and include a target to measure the impact of staff development activities on the quality of their work
- ensure that all staff engage in good relevant CPD activities
- continue to support all of the teachers to ensure that their lessons are good or better, and that they provide learners with good-quality and helpful feedback on their written work
- improve the quality of the discrete English and mathematics provision so that learners have a good experience and make good progress from their starting points
- ensure that all learners know their strengths and weaknesses and have targets that enable them to continually improve their work; ensure that all staff use this information well to inform the planning of learning and assessment
- plan and undertake themed learning walks, prioritising the development of learners' mathematics skills and the use of questioning techniques to extend further the knowledge of all learners.

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

Insufficient progress

Since the previous visit, managers have not ensured that enough improvements have taken place in the teaching, learning and assessment of learners' English and mathematics skills. In 2015/16, too few learners achieved their functional skills qualification or achieved their GCSE at grades A* to C. Functional skills achievement plummeted. GCSE mathematics achievement at A* to C declined to a very low point.

More positively, GCSE English pass rates at A* to C improved by five percentage points and at 46% were well above the low national rate. Learners' attendance at English and mathematics classes has improved to 88%.

Managers have responded swiftly to learners' previously poor achievements in English and mathematics. They have taken a number of remedial actions including the training of staff in the promotion of learners' skills in all lessons, sharing best practice between teachers, managers' visits to good colleges to learn from their practice, and the promotion of four English and four mathematics skills in all lessons. However, it is too soon to be sure of the impact of these actions on learners' progress and achievement.

Staff are increasingly using the new online learner monitoring system to identify learners' starting points in English and mathematics, and to monitor the progress they make after each monthly assessment. As a result, managers are able to quantify the proportion of learners who are making insufficient, good or better progress. The proportion of learners making good or better progress is not yet high enough, and managers agree that much more work is required to significantly improve this. However, this tool has only recently been developed. Managers are unable to identify how many staff are using it to inform learners of their rates of progress. Feedback received from learners during the visit suggests that few learners know enough about the progress that they are making in English and mathematics.

Managers' analysis of the observations and learning walks in lessons this term show that teachers promote the development of learners' English skills well in vocational and academic lessons and mathematics teachers promote learners' English skills well in GCSE and functional skills classes. However, teachers' development of learners' mathematics skills in vocational and academic lessons remains underdeveloped.

During the monitoring visit, one inspector conducted a joint learning walk with a college manager. They visited four GCSE and functional skills lessons. The stronger features observed included teachers:

- making good use of an English GCSE email club to set learners additional learning activities after each lesson, so that they practise further the skills that require improvement
- using timed activities to ensure a good pace of learning
- using extension class activities to ensure that the most able are sufficiently challenged
- encouraging peer marking, teamworking and good use of practical learning in mathematics to promote improvements in learners' skills development.

The weaker features observed included teachers:

- insufficiently planning to meet the needs of individual learners in lessons, poor use of questions to engage all learners and extend learning, and little measurement of learning; as a result, lessons were dull, too few learners were engaged and too few were making sufficient progress
- insufficiently promoting employability skills by allowing learners to wear coats and hoodies in hot classrooms, demonstrating that they were not ready to learn
- insufficiently promoting note taking or the use of glossaries by learners, and not checking learners' ability to spell complex or technical words.

Priorities for improvement

Leaders and managers must ensure that all learners make good progress and achieve their English and mathematics qualifications by:

- considering providing GCSE and functional skills teachers with additional opportunities to develop further their teaching and assessment skills by undertaking additional training
- developing a bespoke training programme for GCSE and functional skills teachers, which incorporates training, coaching, mentoring, reflecting, peer observing, buddying and online learning, and using the latest research in the teaching of English and mathematics to improve the skill set of the teachers and the quality of provision
- ensuring that all staff use frequently the new online English and mathematics progress monitoring tool to plan teaching, learning, assessment and support, to provide learners with detailed and accurate information regarding their progress and to identify the actions required in order to help them to improve
- measuring and recording English and mathematics learning that takes place inside and outside the classroom using the new online tools; recording the actions taken by staff and learners to improve poor rates of progress
- auditing the impact of teachers' feedback on English and mathematics written work to see if learners' skills are improving
- engaging senior leaders and governors in an ongoing dialogue with learners to identify how well they are developing their English and mathematics skills over time, and using the feedback to inform their decision making
- establishing an email club in GCSE mathematics and in functional skills to mirror the successful GCSE English club
- developing a reading improvement strategy to improve all learners' reading skills and vocabulary
- providing learning support assistants and learning centre staff with access to the English and mathematics progress monitoring tool; training them to use the information effectively to support learners' skills development and to improve their effectiveness
- ensuring that all staff take every opportunity to develop learners' English and mathematics skills in all learning settings.

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