

Stockport College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third and final re-inspection monitoring visit to Stockport College following publication of the inspection report on 24 November 2016, which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare and outcomes for learners. Of the three provision types inspected, 16 to 19 study programmes and apprenticeships were judged inadequate and adult learning programmes required improvement.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in producing and implementing a clear action plan in response to the areas of improvement identified at the previous inspection? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have continued to modify and refine the college's post-inspection action plan, placing an increased focus on the areas of recommendation identified in the most recent inspection report.

Senior managers continue to hold curriculum managers to account through explicit objectives detailed in improvement plans and discussions that take place at weekly curriculum meetings. When actions are not completed or the improvements are too slow, senior managers use performance management processes to attempt to improve the situation, either by supporting staff to improve or by staff leaving the college. Since the previous monitoring visit, 27 teachers and managers have left the college. Several have been replaced by new staff who are clear about the minimum requirements that senior managers expect of them.

Governors now receive more detailed information which they can use to hold senior managers to account. They have regular discussions in meetings and challenge senior managers to improve the standards of education and training at the college more swiftly. A few governors with educational experience complete learning walks at the college on a regular basis to see for themselves the quality of teaching and learning at the college, which they feel is gradually improving from an initially low position.

A few reports to governors from senior managers focus disproportionately on headline data rather than data that identifies clearly all areas of poor performance. For example, data provided to the governing body for GCSE English and mathematics does not detail the 9 to 4 for English or A* to C grades for mathematics, nor does it inform governors of the progress that learners make between grade boundaries. Too much emphasis is placed on the achievement of qualifications between grades A* to G in mathematics and 9 to 1 in English. Similarly, while achievement data has improved by around five percentage points in adult learning, the vast majority of this

improvement is due to the very high achievement of very short trade union and bespoke employability courses for a local airport, which account for around one-third of enrolments. Conversely, there are significant variances in achievement data for a minority of more substantial courses.

Senior managers were too slow to react to the recommendations identified in the previous inspection report. Due to senior managers' slow response, immediately following the inspection, too little progress was made in improving the standard of education and training at the college. The pace of improvement has been significantly increased in the past six months. However, this was too late to generate the improvements needed to have a positive impact on 16- to 18-year-old learner outcomes. Almost one in five 16- to 18-year-old learners did not complete, and left their courses early in 2016/17. This low retention had a demonstrable effect on achievement rates. Consequently, internal data indicates that the achievement rate for 16- to 18-year-old learners has deteriorated by around two percentage points in 2016/17. More than one quarter of learners did not achieve their qualifications, which is too low.

What progress have leaders and managers made in implementing a rigorous system to monitor all learners' progress and how effectively do governors hold senior managers to account, ensuring that more learners and apprentices stay on their programme and achieve their qualifications within the planned timescales? Reasonable progress

Senior managers continue to prioritise the development of systems to allow curriculum and senior managers and governors to assess the progress that learners make on their qualifications. Senior managers acknowledge that the reports produced in the previous academic year did not allow them to identify fully the progress that learners made on their qualifications. This lack of information was particularly evident at entry level and levels 1 and 2.

Senior managers have prioritised the development of a new dashboard for the current academic year to incorporate a much greater breadth of data to inform progress monitoring. These sources include attendance and punctuality data, enhanced initial assessment data, use of existing progress monitoring systems, alongside the implementation of an online reflective log, which all learners will complete on a weekly basis. At the time of the visit, no progress data was available as the first assessment window had yet to take place.

Governors do not yet have a thorough understanding of the progress that learners make on their courses. Despite governors being trained on the dashboard, too few access or understand what the data is telling them or how to hold senior managers to account for poor performance. Governors acknowledge that the data dashboard provided to them in 2016/17 was not accurate and was overly optimistic, failing to provide them with a correct picture of the progress that groups of learners were making on their qualifications. Senior managers' forecast data, presented to

governors in June 2017, one month before the end of the academic year, was around four percentage points higher than the actual end-of-year position.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment? Reasonable progress

In May 2017, senior managers appointed a teaching and learning manager to improve the standard of education and training at the college and enhance the support that teachers receive to improve their teaching practice. Since their appointment, the manager and deputy principal have implemented a new streamlined teaching and learning strategy with his recently formed team. The teaching and learning manager and the curriculum management team have completed extensive 'walkthrough' observations of lessons in all subject areas throughout the college. The evaluations of these observations have been used to inform continuous professional development priorities for the start of the new academic year.

Senior managers have prioritised and invested in the development of staff teaching skills. The timetable for 2017/18 gives teachers and support staff two hours of professional development per week, specifically focused on improving the aspects of lessons identified as being weak.

Managers now have a better understanding of where poor standards of education and training exist, and are aware of the reasons for weak practice. However, managers do not record clear and concise improvement actions sufficiently in performance review documentation; nor is there sufficient documentary evidence of the support that teachers will receive to improve their practice. The newly recruited teaching and learning manager acknowledges the lack of detail in documentation and in the subsequent action plan, and is working hard to deal with these inconsistencies with his newly formed team.

Too much inconsistency is still present across the college in relation to the standards of education and training. Inspectors identified improved standards in trade subjects such as carpentry, brickwork and engineering where previously poor standards of training had been identified. For example, level 2 engineering learners learn new filing techniques and the importance of tolerance and accuracy when manufacturing a drill drift to industry requirements. While level 1 brickwork learners support and challenge each other to construct a brick structure within specific timescales, espousing the effective teamwork demanded by employers. However, a minority of learners do not receive a positive experience of learning in subjects such as health and social care and plumbing, where persistent poor standards of education have not been dealt with sufficiently by senior managers. Teachers in too many lessons do not check sufficiently that learners understand what they have been taught before moving on to the next subject. A few learners then lose interest and become frustrated due to their lack of understanding.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that assessors rigorously assess apprentices' starting points and plan programmes to meet apprentices' varying needs? Reasonable progress

The college no longer provides apprenticeships. All apprentices have been transferred to a partner college which proposes to merge with Stockport College this academic year. Due to this move inspectors did not have the opportunity to conduct observations of teaching and learning at the monitoring visit.

In 2016/17, overall achievement rates increased by around 14 percentage points and achievement rates within the planned timescale increased by around seven percentage points. However, only around half of apprentices who were due to complete their programmes did so on time, which is too low.

Managers trialled a new methodology of monitoring the progress that apprentices make on their programmes from when they start their apprenticeship. Managers identify that around 80% of these apprentices, who have taken part in this trial, are making the expected progress on their programmes. However, inspectors were not able to speak with any apprentices or scrutinise their work to evaluate the accuracy of these reports, due to the transfer of apprentices to the partner college.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that learners and apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills while at the college, make good progress in attaining their English and mathematics qualifications and achieve good grades in their GCSEs? Reasonable progress

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders at the college have recruited a new management team and replaced many of the underperforming English and mathematics staff. The revised staff induction programme is more comprehensive and outlines leaders' expectations clearly. Senior managers have changed their previous policy of putting all learners on GCSE English and mathematics courses who had not already achieved a grade C. They now offer the option for learners who have lower than a grade F to sit functional skills qualifications and use this as a stepping stone to develop learners' literacy and numerical skills.

Managers have implemented a more comprehensive assessment schedule for 2017/18. This includes a more in-depth assessment of learners' starting points and subsequent assessments completed every six weeks to assess learners' progress. The process has been well communicated to all staff. Vocational tutors receive ongoing support and training by the English and mathematics team to improve the links they make between English and mathematics and vocational learning. They have also received training on how to improve the skills of those learners who already have at least a grade C. However, as yet they do not have the skills to assist learners to develop their mathematics and English skills sufficiently in their vocational context.

Managers have worked very closely with heads of study to ensure that English and mathematics lessons are 'locked in' between vocational training. The purpose of this is to improve the attendance at these sessions and maximise learners' access to full days of learning in the college. This strategy appears to have improved the attendance in these sessions, with the large majority being well attended.

Senior managers and the newly recruited English and mathematics manager are working hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning that learners receive. Where new teachers have been recruited, their enthusiasm and the brisk pace of their lessons engage learners well.

What strategies have leaders and managers put in place to improve attendance and reduce the amount of learners that leave their courses early, and how effective have these been? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers continue to have high expectations of attendance and punctuality. This was reinforced in the most recent college inductions when the transition principal spoke to students at the start of the term. The vast majority of students comply with rules set by managers in the college, including the wearing of lanyards for identification. Behaviour in corridors and classrooms is also much improved compared to inspectors' previous visits to the college. However, behaviour and attitudes towards learning remain poor for a small minority of learners, in spite of managers' actions. College targets for attendance were not achieved in 2016/17.

Learners receive constructive information, advice and guidance prior to starting courses. The enrolment process in the current year is more straightforward than previously. Vocational tutors have clear guidance which they follow to ensure that learners are placed on the right course at the right level.

Staff and managers now use the management information system more effectively to record levels of attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Managers now intervene swiftly where performance is not at the expected standard and support learners to make the progress of which they are capable. The system now contains more detailed notes on who has already missed lessons, actions taken and any further follow-up required. Senior and middle managers closely monitor those who are identified at risk of leaving the college or who are not complying with the raised expectations of behaviour and standards of work.

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