

Leeds College of Building

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Name of lead inspector: Malcolm Fraser, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: General further education college

Address: North Street
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Leeds College of Building was inspected between 28 November and 1 December 2017. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. Inspectors judged that the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare and outcomes for learners all required improvement. Inspectors judged that 16 to 19 study programmes required improvement and that adult learning programmes and apprenticeships were good.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Themes

What steps have leaders taken to ensure that self-assessment is more critical, and the findings lead to effective action to improve weaker aspects of provision? Significant progress

Following the inspection in November 2017, leaders and governors promptly established a 'task and finish' group and produced a detailed improvement plan aimed at addressing the weaknesses identified by inspectors. Leaders provide governors with detailed progress reports against the actions in the plan every month. Governors are now more critical about aspects of the college's performance, and they use the information that they receive to challenge leaders when they consider that the progress leaders and managers are making in bringing about improvements is not quick enough.

Leaders rightly recognised that, to bring about the necessary improvements, the procedures in place for monitoring performance and evaluating the quality of provision at all levels in the college needed to be strengthened. They have made significant changes to the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing all aspects of performance at course level. Leaders took effective action to remove repetitive and largely descriptive aspects of course review procedures and have taken steps to raise the expectations that they have of staff, students and apprentices. Course leaders are now set challenging targets relating to students' and apprentices' attendance, punctuality, retention and progress. They are now required to evaluate their courses at five stages in each academic year using comprehensive data on performance. They are also required to identify the actions that they are taking to help them to improve following frequent lesson observations, including training. As a result, managers now hold course leaders to account more effectively for the quality of their courses and for students' and apprentices' performance. Course leaders identify

more promptly students and apprentices who are at risk of falling behind or leaving the college, and take appropriate action to support them.

The more detailed and evaluative course self-assessments inform faculty-level self-assessments and performance reports. College leaders use these to hold managers to account more effectively and to identify more quickly courses where retention, attendance and student progress are falling behind the targets set. As a result, managers now deal more quickly and effectively with staff who they identify as underperforming. They provide these staff with the support and development that they need to improve and, if staff do not make the necessary improvements, managers instigate formal capability procedures more promptly.

As a result of a more critical and evaluative approach to self-assessment, leaders and governors are realistic about the progress that they have made in bringing about improvements to the college, and about the further steps that they need to take. In the college's self-assessment for 2017/18, leaders and governors have judged that study programmes require further improvement. They have made well-informed judgements about the aspects of study programmes that need to be improved, such as students' progress and achievements in English and mathematics. Improvement plans focus in detail on the steps that leaders and managers are taking to bring about improvements and clarify the evidence required to demonstrate that these have had sufficient impact.

What actions have leaders taken to improve the proportion of students and apprentices who achieve qualifications in English and mathematics? **Reasonable progress**

At the time of the inspection in November 2017, leaders were in the process of restructuring and strengthening the leadership, management and teaching team responsible for delivering English and mathematics provision, having recognised that this required improvement. Since the inspection, leaders and managers have continued to invest significantly in this area, recruiting experienced subject specialists to management and teaching roles. Many of the teachers who taught these subjects previously have left the college.

Leaders and managers of the English and mathematics faculty have used their considerable experience, often gained in secondary schools, well to make improvements to the English and mathematics curriculum. They link effectively with teachers in vocational subjects to help them to plan and deliver teaching and learning activities which highlight to students and apprentices the importance and benefits of developing good skills in English and mathematics. As a result of more frequent and challenging course self-assessment and reviews, vocational course tutors are now more actively involved in encouraging students and apprentices to attend lessons in English and mathematics and in supporting them when they are struggling in either subject.

Outcomes for students and apprentices in English and mathematics improved in 2017/18, but leaders and managers rightly recognise that these are still not good enough in all areas. Leaders and managers now ensure that a higher proportion of students on study programmes are enrolled onto GCSE qualifications rather than functional skills qualifications. In 2015/16, the achievement rates for students who achieved a good grade at GCSE were well below the Yorkshire and Humber region provider averages in both English and mathematics. Over the subsequent two years, this has improved markedly, and the proportions of students that achieved a grade 4 or above in 2017/18 improved in both subjects. In English, the proportion of students who achieved a grade 4 or above was around the average for Yorkshire and Humber region providers and in mathematics it was higher. Although smaller numbers of students and apprentices now take functional skills qualifications, the proportions who achieve are too low, particularly at levels 1 and 2.

Leaders and managers of the English and mathematics faculty have developed an ambitious plan to improve further the proportions of students and apprentices who make good progress and achieve in these subjects. They have strengthened the procedures for establishing the starting points of students who joined study programmes from September 2018. As in previous years, students were initially enrolled on qualifications based on the results they achieved in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 4. In addition, this year, all students have undergone detailed initial assessments in both English and mathematics. Teachers have used the results of these to identify students' levels of skill in each component of the respective curriculum for both subjects. They use this information to plan learning activities that are more appropriate to individual students' development needs and, where appropriate, based on the progress students make to move them onto more suitable qualifications.

How effective have actions taken by leaders and managers been in ensuring that students on study programmes, particularly at level 1, progress to higher level programmes, apprenticeships or employment as soon as they are able? Reasonable progress

Leaders have established an expectation that staff should plan study programmes so that students can progress to higher levels as soon as they are able rather than this being determined by the average progress of the full class. They have communicated this clearly to all staff. The progress that students are making in the current year is now reviewed by teachers and their managers at course self-assessment and reviews which take place five times a year. Through this, teachers and managers have a better awareness of those students who are making rapid progress and who have the potential to progress to a higher level of study in the current academic year. At the time of this monitoring visit, only two and a half months into the year, no students have yet progressed to a higher level.

Leaders have taken effective steps to create a more ambitious culture across the college for what students can achieve. This has been effective in reducing the number of students who remain on low-level courses for too long. A much higher proportion of students progressed from level 1 to level 2 study programmes at the start of the 2018/19 academic year compared to the previous year.

How successful have leaders been in ensuring that teachers on study programmes take sufficient account of students' starting points and individual circumstances when planning the curriculum and individual learning activities?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have used the findings of the more critical self-assessment procedures to develop a comprehensive range of staff training and development activities. Most teachers have welcomed these, which they recognise as helping them to be more effective as practitioners. They value the focus on getting the basics right of planning learning activities to meet individual students' needs and abilities. The impact of this has been more successful in practical lessons than it has been in theory lessons.

In practical lessons, teachers take good account of students' starting points and their levels of skill and knowledge to set appropriately challenging tasks. Students hone and improve their practical skills well because of this. Teachers provide helpful and constructive feedback to students so that they make good progress in developing their skills and in applying them to new and more complex situations.

Too often in vocational theory lessons, students are expected to complete the same activities as the whole group, and at the same pace. Teachers do not set sufficiently high expectations for the most able students in theory lessons.

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