

Thomas Rotherham College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Thomas Rotherham College was inspected in January 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the college to require improvement. Teaching, learning and assessment, the effectiveness of leadership and management and outcomes for learners were all found to require improvement. Personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged to be good by inspectors.

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

How effective are the quality improvement and performance management arrangements that governors, leaders and managers have put in place since the previous inspection? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, the college had a small senior leadership team with a part-time interim principal. Following the inspection, leaders focused on improving teachers' practice and they communicated their expectations for improvement to teachers. However, leaders did not formally include these expectations in their performance management of individual staff. Consequently, improvements to teaching, learning and assessment did not happen consistently across the college. A-level examination results improved slightly in the summer, when an increased number of students achieved high grades. Too many students, however, did not make the progress of which they were capable.

Since then, governors have recruited a full senior leadership team, and the pace of improvement has quickened. A permanent principal took up position in June 2018, and a deputy principal, with responsibility for quality assurance and quality improvement, took up post in August 2018. The two assistant principals are accountable for clearly defined areas of the college's work. Governors and senior leaders are about to implement a carefully considered restructure of middle management. Leaders are putting in place heads of faculty to strengthen curriculum leadership and improve communication and accountability. It is too early to identify the impact of these actions.

The new leadership team used the examination results from summer 2018 to evaluate rigorously and accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They scrutinised closely subject areas in which examination results were weak to identify improvements that were needed. Managers' observations of lessons identified precisely how teachers need to improve their practice. Managers are supporting teachers well to make these improvements. Leaders have ensured that all teaching staff have had a thorough appraisal which sets clear and precise objectives for them to achieve in the year ahead. Leaders and managers are committed to

developing a good learning culture in the college. They expect teachers to engage in research about an aspect of teaching, learning and assessment for one of their appraisal targets.

Each subject has a suitable quality improvement plan which contains clear improvement actions. Managers monitor progress regularly by using in-year assessment information. They add or amend actions if they identify additional issues following lesson observations and their scrutiny of in-year management information. For example, recent assessment information in mathematics highlighted concerns which managers tackled rapidly. In a few subject areas, staff have been slow to implement the actions in their quality improvement plans. For example, they have not fully adopted managers' required approach to providing feedback to students.

Managers have plans, which are in their infancy, to increase the accountability of tutors for students' attendance. The attendance of students in Year 12 has increased and is high, but the attendance of students in Year 13 is not high enough.

The new principal correctly identified that too many students leave the college before the end of their programme. Leaders and managers have improved the initial advice and guidance and enrolment processes for new students. This ensures that study programmes contain suitable combinations of subjects and courses to meet students' needs and aspirations. The proportion of Year 12 students remaining on their programmes has increased significantly, compared with the same point in the previous year, and is now high.

What progress have managers made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that teachers use high-quality learning activities that support and challenge students to achieve their potential?

Reasonable progress

Teachers, subject leaders and heads of department are right to speak confidently about the changes that they are making to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Most are enthusiastic about using new teaching techniques and are excited about the opportunities to use information and communication technologies to extend learning beyond the classroom. Teachers appreciate the structured approach to continuing professional development. They are able to apply new techniques and approaches quickly. Teaching, learning and assessment are part of leaders' weekly briefings with staff. Leaders regularly share the good practice that they observe in lessons. In lessons where teachers use new techniques, students participate more fully in learning, lessons are interesting, and students are more likely to remain on their courses.

In many subjects, teachers prepare their lessons well and think carefully about the activities that they use. They challenge students to learn, remember and apply new knowledge. They use questions well to check that learners understand. They adapt their lessons when they identify that learning is not fully secure. They are unafraid to

deviate from planned lessons and to go over topics again, so that learners make the progress that they should. Students in computing classes demonstrate high-level, problem-solving and coding skills. They work well together to tease out solutions to problems, with good support from their teachers. For example, they discuss ways to make a game more complex by making a simulated car more difficult to steer around a corner as the speed increases.

Teachers ensure that learners have the skills that they need in extended writing, in solving complex problems and in presenting their work in detailed and engaging portfolios. The most recent assessment information indicates that the large majority of current students are making at least their expected progress.

In a minority of subject areas, improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are slower. For example, in a few science lessons, teachers move on to new activities too quickly before checking that their students have understood fully the current activity. Other than in practical and vocational science lessons, students have too few opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, science. In a very few subjects, teachers provide confusing explanations to students, or they are not clear enough about timescales and deadlines for completion of tasks. Consequently, students develop their knowledge and understanding more slowly in these subjects.

What progress have managers made in improving the feedback that students receive from their teachers so that it is helpful, and enables students to improve the quality of their work?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have implemented a clear strategy that focuses on the importance of high-quality assessment and feedback to students. Managers rightly recognise that, in subjects where students complete well-planned assessments and receive good feedback, they make more rapid progress. Managers require teachers to provide students with directed improvement and reflection time ('DIRT') when they receive feedback. Students use the time to improve their work. For example, economics students redraw and label aggregate supply curves accurately.

In lessons where teachers use the 'DIRT' approach effectively, students know how to respond to feedback, and they make improvements to their work accurately and efficiently. As a result, students make good progress in developing the academic skills required in their subjects. Law students receive helpful feedback about how to improve the inclusion of precedents to illustrate points in their written work. They receive clear guidance about this in lessons so that they use legal terminology increasingly well in their assessments.

In a few subjects, teachers have been slow to implement the improvements that managers require. In these subjects, the progress that students make remains

slower. Students are less clear about how they need to improve their work to meet examination board requirements to a higher standard.

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