

# NCG

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

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**Unique reference number:** 130552

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**Type of provider:** General further education college

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

NCG was inspected in May 2018. 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 and apprenticeships required improvement and that adult learning programmes and provision for learners with high needs 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 previous inspection.

NCG (the group) is a very large further education provider. It consists of five general further education colleges, one sixth-form college and two independent learning providers, all of which are known as divisions. This monitoring visit covered provision at Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, Kidderminster College and Lewisham Southwark College. It also covered 16 to 19 study programmes at Rathbone Training.

### Themes

**What actions have governors and executive leaders taken since the last inspection to improve governance at NCG and its divisions, and how successful have these actions been?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, the corporation board members have completed a full review of the governance arrangements for NCG. The chair of the board, board members and divisional governors have taken actions that have improved governors' effectiveness. They have revised the governance terms of reference and established a new governance structure that focuses consistently on what the group needs to achieve. Governors now provide greater challenge and hold divisional boards to account for improving the quality of provision in each division. They have evaluated their individual skills and experience and have recruited new governors and additional staff to strengthen the board.

Governors and executive leaders have carefully analysed what they consider to be the root causes of the weaknesses found at the last inspection. They identified priorities for action that include the need for governors to receive accurate and helpful management information and to have a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governors have supported executive leaders to develop a new management information system that ensures they receive helpful and timely performance information at group, division and programme level. Governors use this information effectively. They challenge leaders to improve performance during board meetings, at governor conferences and through focused 'governor lines of enquiry', which form part of the group's quality improvement activities. Governors and leaders have implemented a new teaching initiative. This aims to improve teachers' planning and delivery of learning activities, and to provide support and training to help teachers to develop their professional skills.

The corporation and divisional boards have established sustainable quality improvement initiatives. These are starting to have a beneficial impact on learners and have resulted in better challenge from teachers and an improvement in learners' understanding of the risks relating to radicalisation and extremism. Actions that staff have implemented are beginning to have an impact on increasing learners' attendance. However, governors and leaders are right to recognise that the management information system requires further development so it can provide governors with additional key information. This includes information about the impact of improvements, progress towards achieving group targets, and the group's performance compared with that of the sector as a whole.

**What progress have leaders made in improving outcomes for apprentices and in ensuring that apprentices deepen their knowledge and skills?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have revised the process that they use to track the progress of apprentices, and they have used the new process for apprentices who started in September 2018. Trainers carefully consider the skills that apprentices already have when they begin their programme. Planning of off-the-job training with employers takes close account of gaps in apprentices' skills and knowledge. The introduction of an apprenticeship council provides oversight of the quality of apprenticeships at group level. Its aim is to identify weaker aspects of the provision that need addressing and to highlight good practice to share across the group. The new group-wide apprenticeship policy clearly outlines leaders' expectation of the type of activity that apprentices should carry out while on their programme. This has resulted in divisions ceasing to work with several employers and a significant reduction in the volume of subcontracted apprenticeships.

Leaders and managers have devolved the management of apprenticeships successfully to curriculum areas in each division. Leaders scrutinise the progress that apprentices make towards achieving their apprenticeship. However, too often this focuses on the completion of units towards qualifications, rather than on apprentices' broader skills and behaviours. The improvements to the tracking and monitoring of the progress of new apprentices results in their making better progress from their starting points. This is particularly the case at Newcastle College, Kidderminster College and Lewisham Southwark College. However, interventions to improve the

progress of apprentices who have been on programme for a longer time have not had sufficient impact and, in too many areas, these apprentices make progress that is too slow. Leaders are right to recognise that this is an action that managers need to tackle with a sense of urgency.

Leaders and managers use the 'Great place to teach' initiative to provide trainers with improved staff training and opportunities to develop their professional practice. However, leaders and managers focus too much, during apprenticeship performance reviews, on the implementation of recent initiatives rather than on measuring the impact of these initiatives on apprentices' progress and skills development. Leaders and managers do not have a sufficiently clear view of the impact that the new teaching initiative is having on the quality of apprenticeship training.

**What actions have leaders taken to develop teachers' skills in providing challenging learning activities for learners on study programmes, and what has the impact been?** **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have developed and implemented the 'Great place to teach' initiative. Leaders have reviewed the skills and experience of all teaching staff and have recruited teachers to fill the skills gaps. They have invested significantly in a staff training programme to improve teachers' planning and delivery of challenging activities for learners. Leaders and managers provide effective training for teachers whose performance is not up to the expected group standard. The large majority of teachers identified as poorly performing have either left the organisation or have improved their teaching. As a result, the proportion of learners at Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College and Kidderminster College who are on track to achieve their aspirational target grade has increased since last year.

Leaders at Newcastle Sixth Form College use effective activities, such as reviewing learners' work, to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. These activities enable leaders to ascertain how well staff provide feedback on assessed work that challenges learners to improve. They also inform leaders about the extent to which learners carry out challenging tasks in class.

At Newcastle College and Newcastle Sixth Form College, teachers challenge learners well to develop their practical mathematical skills. They use highly relevant vocational examples to ensure that learners apply their knowledge well. For example, in catering lessons, learners accurately calculate proportion sizes to avoid wastage. Learners in accountancy and sport use technical mathematical calculations with confidence.

Leaders and managers do not have a sufficiently clear overview of the progress that learners on study programmes make from their starting points. Staff at Rathbone Training, Lewisham Southwark College and Kidderminster College do not review or record learners' progress towards their targets closely enough. As a result, learners

do not receive enough challenge to achieve their full potential. In too many cases at Newcastle College, teachers do not challenge learners sufficiently to improve their writing skills and so learners continue to repeat their errors.

Managers at Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College and Kidderminster College use frequent observations of lessons to evaluate and improve the quality of learning activities. However, this is not consistent across all subject areas or divisions. As a result, a small minority of teachers do not make rapid enough progress in improving their skills in planning and implementing challenging learning activities. In too many instances, managers carrying out observations do not identify weaknesses in teaching sessions with sufficient accuracy. Consequently, they cannot address specific weaknesses when they plan interventions to help teachers to improve their practice.

**What actions have leaders and managers taken to improve the attendance of learners at the centres where this was low during the last inspection, and what has the impact been?**      **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, executive leaders have implemented a range of well-considered actions to increase learners' attendance. These include the implementation of a more accurate attendance reporting dashboard and the strengthening of attendance strategies and policies. These actions mean that leaders and managers now have a more accurate overview of attendance. Leaders have invested in additional staffing to monitor learners' attendance closely and to provide support for learners to overcome personal issues that affect their attendance. A tutorial and progress policy clearly sets out high expectations for the frequency with which staff must contact learners who miss lessons, and staff generally adhere to this policy.

Attendance is improving at Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, Kidderminster College and Rathbone Training. Overall attendance for the group has increased slightly. However, attendance remains too low across a few divisions and is below group targets, particularly at Lewisham Southwark College.

Leaders and managers are right to recognise that attendance in English and mathematics lessons across the group is too low and urgently needs to improve. They have recently taken action to improve attendance in these subjects at Newcastle College, Newcastle Sixth Form College, Kidderminster College, West Lancashire College and Lewisham Southwark College. It is too early to see the impact at this stage.

**To what extent have learners improved their understanding of how to stay safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism at the centres where this was identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have developed and implemented new safeguarding training materials for staff and learners. They have strengthened the collaboration with external specialists, such as the Home Office and regional 'Prevent' duty coordinators. Learners participate in activities with celebrities to increase their awareness of youth violence and crime. This is to help learners develop their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, particularly in the context of their locations.

Staff reinforce the relevance of British values well at Lewisham Southwark College, Kidderminster College, Newcastle College and Newcastle Sixth Form College. Teachers plan and deliver teaching activities that promote learners' understanding of life in modern Britain and local communities highly effectively. They use current topics that are relevant to learners' lives, such as knife crime, politically extremist views and the recent debate about the denial of citizenship to members of Daesh. Learners confidently debate their rights and responsibilities, the rule of law and the importance of democratic rights.

Learners across the group are aware of the risks from radicalisation and extremism. They know how they should report any concerns. Leaders ensure that they fully implement the actions required to develop learners' understanding. Consequently, learners at Lewisham Southwark College and Kidderminster College have improved their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, in the context of their place of study and where they live.

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