

The Trafford College Group

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

The Trafford College Group (the group) was formed in April 2018 as a result of a merger between Trafford College and Stockport College. The merged college has three main sites. These are at Altrincham in south Trafford, Stretford in north Trafford and Stockport. Approximately 10,000 students attend the merged college.

In October 2017 Trafford College had a short inspection. Inspectors judged the college to have remained good. Stockport College was inspected in January 2018. Inspectors judged adult learning programmes, and personal development, behaviour and welfare to require improvement. They judged 16 to 19 study programmes, all other key judgements and overall effectiveness as inadequate.

The purpose of the monitoring visit was to review the progress that governors, leaders, managers and staff have made since the merger to address the weaknesses identified at Stockport college's inspection in January 2018.

Themes

What progress have governors, senior leaders and managers made since the merger to implement organisational changes that have a positive impact on students and apprentices, including maintaining effective safeguarding arrangements?

Significant progress

The organisational changes that governors and senior leaders have implemented since the merger have been highly effective in bringing about rapid improvements in the quality of education and training for students at the Stockport site.

Since the merger, governors and the principal have strengthened the senior leadership team, and senior and middle management teams throughout the merged college. Heads of studies manage curriculum areas across the group's sites to ensure that best practice is shared across all college sites. They are relentless and focused on actions that improve the quality of education and training for students and apprentices.

The senior leadership team has developed a strategic plan that sets out the priorities for the group's three sites. These include investment in the much-needed redevelopment of the Stockport site. The team has set ambitious key performance indicators across the three sites which are rigorously monitored. The senior leadership team and the staff have developed a set of core values for a 'one college' culture across the merged organisation. This is beginning to have a positive impact on staff. For example, an annual staff conference celebrates staff awards together as one college. In some subject areas specialist teachers work across Trafford and

Stockport. At the previous inspection, students at Stockport were adversely affected by significant changes in staffing. The need to employ temporary staff at Stockport has been addressed and students now benefit from having regular teaching staff on their courses.

The board of governors includes members from the former Trafford and Stockport colleges. They have a very good understanding of strengths and weaknesses across all sites. Governors and senior leaders have monitored rigorously the post inspection action plan for the Stockport site which is now incorporated within the group's quality improvement plan. Their strong leadership has brought about swift and sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for students since the merger.

Senior leaders monitor relentlessly the impact of the quality improvement strategies through a 'health check' process. Heads of studies are held to account for the performance of their courses. Challenging targets are set for attendance, retention and students' progress. Performance against these targets is checked frequently.

Safeguarding has remained a high priority across the merged college. Policies and procedures have been revised because of the merger. Leaders and managers have significantly strengthened safeguarding arrangements. For example, at each site there are day and evening duty managers to deal with any incidents that occur. The named designated safeguarding lead for each site has established effective links with agencies across the two local authorities in which the sites are located. Students feel safe. They demonstrate positive behaviours across the sites.

What actions have senior leaders and managers taken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the Stockport site? How successful have actions been to bring about improvements, including for English and mathematics courses at all the group's sites? Significant progress

The principal and senior leadership team set high expectations for what students and staff can and do achieve. Leaders and managers have revised the lesson-observation process so that it is consistent across all the group's sites. Observers identify the strengths and weaknesses in lessons accurately. They use their findings to inform purposeful continuous staff development across the merged college. For example, senior practitioners provide frequent training sessions in topics such as 'powerful feedback' and 'assessment for learning'. Teachers work together in action research groups on self-selected themes to improve their own teaching practice as a result of observers' feedback.

In lessons observed at Stockport, teachers now plan learning activities that are more demanding than observed at the previous inspection. Students develop the knowledge and skills they need for work and now take pride in their work. For example, brickwork students build walls with great precision. Beauty therapy

students apply make-up to high standards required for working in industry. Catering students who serve food to customers in the training restaurant demonstrate excellent front-of-house skills.

In vocational lessons, teachers plan and deliver activities that help students develop the English and mathematical skills they need to work in specific occupational areas. For example, motor-vehicle students cost out materials to meet the specification required for an off-road vehicle. Students on beauty courses extend their vocabulary and confidence when they carry out consultations with clients. Foundation students develop their confidence and oral skills when they present the results of their work to their peers. Most teachers now provide useful feedback to students which helps them to improve their work.

Most of the group's English and mathematics teachers set aspirational targets and track students' progress closely. In lessons, teachers use students' assessed work to provide one-to-one coaching and to focus students on aspects they need to develop to improve their examination grades.

In a very few lessons, teachers do not challenge all students sufficiently. They do not ask probing questions or link theory to practice. Students' understanding in these lessons is superficial and not extended sufficiently.

A very few teachers in vocational subjects and in English and mathematics do not provide enough specific feedback so that students know how they can improve their work. Vocational teachers do not always provide feedback that helps students to improve their written English.

What actions have senior leaders and managers taken to improve students' attendance at the Stockport site? How much has their attendance improved as a result? Significant progress

In 2017/18, attendance rates improved significantly, albeit from a very low base. Senior leaders and managers introduced a new strategy in 2018/19 to tackle poor attendance and punctuality across all the group's sites. Attendance and punctuality have improved further this year compared to the same time last year.

Managers and teachers monitor attendance rigorously. They challenge students with low attendance and provide support for those who face significant barriers to learning that impedes their attendance. A few teachers display students' attendance and progress in a 'league table'. Students can see the improvements they are making in their attendance. This encourages them to develop positive attitudes to their studies.

Course tutors follow up non-attendance and involve parents and carers from the outset. They set challenging targets and monitor students' progress against them. Actions are escalated if students do not improve their attendance.

Managers and teachers are aware of the personal issues for a small number of students with low attendance. Pastoral support tutors are assigned to 'at risk' students. They work closely with these students to ensure that they are supported with extra classes so they make good progress despite their low attendance.

Students' attendance on most courses at the Stockport site has improved significantly. For example, attendance is high for students on motor-vehicle, hospitality, childcare, computing, creative-media and science courses. Students' attendance on English and mathematics courses has improved considerably compared to this time last year. However, senior leaders and managers recognise that attendance in these subjects is a little lower than in vocational subjects. Managers and teachers are working hard to address this and frequently meet with students to explore the reasons for this, to inform future improvements.

What progress have senior leaders and managers made in reversing the declining trend in achievement rates for students on 16 to 19 study programmes at the Stockport site? Significant progress

Senior leaders' and managers' actions have improved rapidly achievement rates for students on 16 to 19 study programmes. Achievement rates improved significantly in 2017/18 and were high.

Actions taken have brought about improvements in almost all vocational subject areas. In 2017/18, achievement rates improved across all subjects at level 2. Achievement rates for entry-level programmes are also now high. Achievement rates at level 1 improved marginally. However, low achievement of functional-skills qualifications had an adverse impact on achievement rates at level 1. In the current year, the majority of students who are required to enrol on English and mathematics as part of their study programme are working towards GCSE qualifications and not functional skills qualifications. The majority of students are making good progress towards improving their GCSE grades.

The proportion of students who left their study programme early reduced in 2017/18. The proportion of students who remain on their study programme has improved further in the current year and is now very high.

Senior leaders have increased student support resources. A 'learner improvement process' has been established to ensure that students who are at risk of not achieving or who fall behind in their studies are supported by pastoral support tutors and mentors. As a result, they swiftly improve their progress. The college counselling services have been extended to provide support for students with mental health concerns at all the group's sites. Consequently, the proportion of students remaining on their course has increased.

Senior leaders and managers have implemented rigorous tracking and monitoring of students' progress. Currently, the large majority of students on study programmes

are making at least, or better than, the expected progress. However, a few students are still making slow progress.

Senior leaders and managers rightly acknowledge that, although the proportion of students who achieved standard or high grades in GCSE English and mathematics qualifications in 2017/18 improved, this needs to improve further.

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