

Southport and King George V College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

On 31 January 2018, Southport College (SC) merged with King George V sixth-form college (KGV). At their previous full inspections, both colleges were judged good for overall effectiveness. In May 2016, SC had a short inspection and remained good. In KGV's last inspection in September 2017, inspectors judged that 16 to 19 study programmes and all key judgement areas were good. The themes for this monitoring visit are selected from the areas identified for improvement from the previous inspections and the self-assessment report. The progress judgements from this visit will inform Ofsted's risk assessment as to the timing of the next full inspection of the newly merged college.

The college has two sites, both in the centre of Southport. The SC site in Mornington Road provides a wide range of vocational and technical qualifications for young people and adults. The KGV site provides academic and vocational level 3 programmes exclusively for young people. Currently, there are 1,719 learners aged 16 to 18, 2,119 adults and 605 apprentices. The largest subject areas are health, public services and care; business, administration and law; and arts and media.

What progress have senior leaders made in developing an effective quality improvement plan for the merged college? Are there appropriate reporting and monitoring arrangements in place, including rigorous scrutiny and challenge by governors?

Significant progress

Senior leaders have made significant progress in ensuring that effective quality improvement strategies are in place. These have had a beneficial effect on learners and apprentices. As a result of these strategies, the proportion of learners who achieved a high grade increased in 2017/18. Senior leaders have addressed successfully the vast majority of the areas identified as needing improvement in the self-assessment report.

Governance arrangements are very effective. The governing body contains a good mix of skills and experience in education, finance and business. Governors use their experience skilfully to monitor performance rigorously and to challenge senior leaders when performance is below expectations. For example, they challenged senior leaders about the number of learners who achieve high grades in subjects such as science, mathematics and modern foreign languages, which were too low. While numbers have improved, they require further improvement.

Senior leaders and managers have reviewed the self-assessment and quality improvement strategies, so that they are now rigorous. Staff apply them consistently at both sites. For example, the areas for improvement, derived from lesson observations and frequent learning walks, inform staff development activities. Since the merger, managers have held whole-college and curriculum-specific staff development days, which are having a positive impact. Teachers at the KGV site

have focused their development on the teaching of the linear A-levels. As a result, they carry out frequent assessment of learners' learning across the two years of their programme.

Managers assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment accurately by completing a 'curriculum review'. This includes the observation of lessons, the scrutiny of learners' work and an assessment of how much progress learners make on their courses.

Managers use and analyse a range of data sources well to pinpoint any underperformance. The college management team relentlessly monitors the progress made against the agreed actions. They scrutinise very closely those courses identified as 'at risk', through 'subject improvement groups'. This has resulted in improvements. For example, the proportion of learners who stay on their course has risen and is now high. The attendance of learners has increased on most courses. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualification in their planned time has improved.

The quality of provision in a small number of areas still requires improvement. These are attendance in English and mathematics lessons, and the quality of provision in a small number of subjects, which include English and mathematics at level 2 and science and modern foreign languages at level 3.

How successfully do leaders and managers ensure that improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are secured and sustained across all courses and sites?

Reasonable progress

Managers have introduced a more rigorous approach to the monitoring of learners' progress for A-level subjects. Teachers carefully monitor learners' progress through regular assessment and provide swift intervention if learners do not achieve their target grades. As a result, the proportion of learners who achieve their grades has risen. However, there remains too much variance in performance across the range of A-level subjects. For example, most learners studying media, film studies and the arts achieve higher grades than expected. Though improved, too many learners who study biology, sociology and languages do not achieve the high grades of which they are capable.

At the SC site, most teachers plan practical sessions well. Learners develop vocational skills and the technical language needed to help prepare them for work. For example, learners on vocational level 3 media studies courses work in teams to write, produce and edit a soap opera in a professional way over a number of weeks. This helps them gain a range of skills and understand different aspects of working in the media industry.

The majority of students studying A-levels at the KGV site develop a good knowledge of different theories and technical terms related to their subjects. Teachers help learners develop their research and independent study skills to prepare them for higher education. For example, A-level English language learners study and explore topics such as stereotyping, and they use research methods to understand the use of the English language in different cultures in British society.

Across both sites, learners benefit from helpful feedback that helps them improve their practical work. However, the feedback that teachers provide following assessment does not always help learners know what they need to do to improve their work.

A small minority of teachers at both sites do not plan activities that challenge all learners. The pace of learning in a few lessons is too slow. Teachers do not consolidate or check learners' prior knowledge before they introduce new topics. As a result, learners' progress in these lessons is slow.

The quality of teaching and learning of level 2 English and mathematics at the SC site requires improvement. Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate actions to address this, but it is too soon to measure the impact.

What progress have senior leaders made in implementing organisational change related to the merger and ensuring a positive impact for learners, apprentices and stakeholders? **Reasonable progress**

The governing body, the principal and his senior team have a clear ambition and strategy for the newly merged college to become outstanding. They have quickly taken steps to ensure the stability of the college for learners, apprentices, staff and stakeholders. This means that finances are stable, and leaders have been able to invest in improving both sites to enhance the learning environments for learners and apprentices.

Since the merger, the principal has restructured and strengthened the management team to create a single college structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability for curriculum departments. Leaders and managers have completed a curriculum review to ensure that courses meet local needs well. The college offers a range of A-level and level 3 courses at the KGV site and a wide range of technical and vocational courses, including apprenticeships for young people and adults, at the SC site. The senior leadership team has ensured that the sites retain their distinctive offer. This has resulted in an increase in the number of learners studying A-levels at KGV.

Senior leaders have worked hard to harmonise the culture across the college, while retaining the uniqueness of each site. Leaders and managers have not yet revised all the operational policies and procedures to ensure that there is a consistent approach for all learners and staff.

Have governors and senior leaders ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding remain effective? **Reasonable progress**

Safeguarding remains effective. Senior leaders and managers have reviewed the safeguarding and associated policies since the merger. They have ensured that a single policy exists that staff understand and implement.

Staff at all levels have received training to the appropriate level, dependent on their roles. The large safeguarding team includes a well-trained designated safeguarding

lead. A governor with previous experience of being a senior designated lead ensures that governors receive good information about the effectiveness of the safeguarding policies.

Progress tutors meet with individual learners and groups of learners on a weekly basis, so that they quickly detect any concerns. The consistent pastoral curriculum ensures that learners learn, in the early weeks of their courses, about their health, safety and well-being. They know who to go to, if they have any concerns.

The majority of learners have a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism. Staff highlight the risks associated with working online. Learner support staff work at each site, so that all learners have good access to support, should they need it. Learners say they feel safe and are safe. They work safely in college workshops and in the workplace.

All staff, including volunteers, contractors and external groups, undergo an enhanced check before they start work. Staff keep an accurate and up-to-date record of these checks. They check new employees' eligibility to work in the United Kingdom and ensure that all new starts complete the required safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training.

Managers have not revised the safe recruitment of staff policy since the merger, or in the timescale that they set. This means that staff at KGV review their checks annually, whereas staff at the SC site do not.

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