

Stockton Riverside College

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Ken Merry, HMI

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Stockton Riverside College is a large further education college serving the communities of Stockton, Redcar and surrounding areas. On 1 August 2018, Redcar and Cleveland College dissolved and merged into Stockton Riverside College. Stockton Riverside College was confirmed to be a good provider at its short inspection in November 2017. Redcar and Cleveland College was judged to be inadequate at its inspection in October 2017. Both colleges retained their pre-merger names for marketing purposes.

The college has sites in Stockton, Billingham, Redcar and Thornaby. Courses available at the college include 16 to 19 study programmes, adult learning programmes, courses for learners who have high needs, apprenticeships, and higher education programmes. The majority of learners study vocational qualifications. A range of A-level courses is available at the Bede Sixth Form College. The college also operates a wholly owned subsidiary, the NETA Training Group (NETA).

Compared with the rest of the country, Stockton and Redcar are areas of high social deprivation. As of September 2018, the rate of unemployment in Stockton and Redcar is similar to the rest of the north east, and significantly higher than the rate for England. In 2017/18, the proportion of pupils in Stockton and Redcar local authorities who achieved GCSE grade 5 or above in English and mathematics was slightly lower than the national average.

Themes

What progress are governors, leaders and managers making in ensuring that they secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment across all centres?

Significant progress

The main priority of governors, leaders and managers at the college is to provide high-quality teaching and learning across all college sites. Quickly following the merger, the quality improvement team focused its energies on ensuring that teachers based at the Redcar site had the same access to professional development to improve the impact of their teaching as staff based at other sites. Through focused and individual support, most staff at the Redcar site are improving their teaching skills. This is having a demonstrable effect on learners' development, motivation and attendance. Leaders and managers have tackled the weaknesses at the Redcar site while maintaining the quality of provision at the other sites.

Learners are very aware of what they need to do to improve. They understand the requirement to attend college. Managers and teachers encourage learners to use their learning to meet aspirational academic, vocational and personal skills targets. Learners behave well. The vast majority are keen to learn, take pride in their work and are respectful to peers and staff.

Support and pastoral care are good. Teachers deploy support assistants and progress coaches well in lessons. Support assistants work effectively with learners who have additional support needs to help them achieve as well as their peers. Teachers also use the most able learners to support those who are less able. For example, in health and social care, teachers carefully plan work placements so that level 3 learners mentor and support level 1 learners. Teachers expect level 3 learners to be positive role models for level 1 learners. As a result, level 1 learners are motivated to do well and receive support to get the most out of their work placement.

Improvements in the quality of teaching and support have had a positive impact on the performance of learners. In many vocational areas, first-time pass rates and the proportion of learners achieving high grades in their external tests have increased significantly when compared with the results of the previous year.

What progress are senior leaders making in implementing organisational changes, relating to the merger, to ensure a positive impact for learners and apprentices? Significant progress

Swiftly following the merger, the governors and the group principal/chief executive completely reviewed the senior management team and made a number of new appointments. New campus principals are in place at the three main college sites and a new managing director of NETA is in post. They all report to the group principal/chief executive. This has quickly created a culture in which managers are autonomous but accountable. Campus principals consistently make decisions based on the best interests of learners and apprentices at each college site.

Immediately after the merger, governors and senior leaders conducted a thorough and careful assessment of teachers' skills at the Redcar site. They identified actions that they needed to take to improve performance. This resulted in a large number of underperforming teachers leaving the organisation. Where necessary, new staff have joined the college, including departmental heads. Managers very quickly harmonised terms and conditions of employment for staff across all sites following the merger. They ensured that this did not distract from the relentless, whole-college focus on improving the experience of learners. Staff are passionately committed to ensuring that learners receive the best possible teaching so that learners make the progress of which they are capable.

Governors from both pre-merger colleges are on the new board. As a result, the governing body of the merged college is representative of all local communities. The governing body has good representation from local businesses in both boroughs. Where there is a gap in skills or expertise on the governing body, such as in strategic financial planning, the governors are proactive in seeking a permanent appointment to the board. When necessary, they use co-opted governors effectively.

As a result of the swift and highly effective work of senior leaders since the merger, the positive impact on learners and apprentices is clear. In this academic year, the proportion of learners and apprentices remaining on their courses has increased and is now high. Attendance is high for almost all subjects, including English and mathematics,

and across all sites. Apprenticeship achievements are high, and managers have reversed the poor performance found at Redcar and Cleveland College prior to the merger.

What progress are leaders and governors making in ensuring that the curriculum of the merged college meets the needs of learners, employers and stakeholders, as well as being aligned to local and regional employment and skills priorities? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have carefully designed the curriculum to meet local and regional needs. The links between the courses on offer at all centres of the college and the regional priorities identified to address skills gaps are very clear. For example, leaders have invested to create a logistics academy to support the local shipping and distribution businesses based at Teesport and surrounding areas.

Leaders at the college work exceptionally well in partnership with local authorities in both boroughs to identify how best to respond to skills needs. Leaders in both local councils consider the college to be an essential strategic partner in the educational landscape and value highly the contribution that the college makes. They believe that the college fulfils its civic duty by doing the right things for the right reasons. For example, leaders at the college are expanding the number of places that the college can offer to learners who have high needs, to meet a growing demand. They are developing an alternative curriculum to help with the large number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools in Stockton.

The range of provision meets the needs of employers very successfully. Employers strongly believe that leaders and managers listen to them about their needs and adjust the curriculum accordingly. Staff at the college seek feedback from employers to ensure that courses enable learners to develop the skills that they need to be employable. Employers recognise the flexible approach that staff take when delivering training to ensure that it meets their requirements. For example, college leaders support the innovative project of a hair salon in the local hospital in partnership with the local National Health Service trust. The hair salon allows full-time students and apprentices from the college to access and utilise real work experience and skills training.

Leaders have strong relationships with the combined authority. Through careful negotiation, the college has received substantial capital funds from the combined authority to support the development and regeneration of parts of the college estate. This includes ensuring that the information technology infrastructure at the Redcar site is fit for purpose. Additionally, college managers work well with partners to raise the aspirations and ambitions of local residents. For example, the college recently hosted an 'educating engineers' event at the Redcar site, in conjunction with a local university, aimed at raising the profile of local employment opportunities.

What progress are leaders and managers making in ensuring that attendance at English and mathematics classes improves, so that a greater proportion of learners make good progress in developing their English and mathematical skills? Significant progress

Leaders and managers place a high priority on ensuring high attendance and good skill development in English and mathematics lessons. They recognise that a single approach will not work in all subject areas. They promote a flexible approach to meeting learners' needs. They encourage teachers to try new strategies to increase attendance and improve the quality of lessons. They empower staff to try new ideas and pilot these to develop learners' English and mathematical skills in vocational subjects. Staff are accountable to college managers for their actions. Consequently, they review and evaluate the success of new initiatives frequently, adapting ideas where necessary to ensure that they are successful. Staff continue to work with external partners, including a local academy school that delivers GCSE English and mathematics. As a direct result of this effective partnership working, learners develop their skills and understanding particularly well.

Staff give learners highly effective feedback on their work. They use this feedback to coach learners on how to use a range of techniques to improve their skills and work. The quality of learners' work has improved significantly, as have their skills and confidence in their own abilities. As a result of the feedback they receive, learners know the progress that they are making, understand their targets and are motivated well to achieve their best.

The quality team constantly reviews the impact of new initiatives. Staff in the quality team consistently provide targeted support to individual tutors to build their expertise incrementally and hone their practice. This support motivates tutors to have high expectations of their learners and has a positive impact on learners' progress.

Managers have given careful thought to the timing of English and mathematics classes in learners' timetables. They have adjusted the times and days of classes to increase attendance. Across all sites, attendance at English and mathematics classes has increased and is now mostly high. It is close to the high attendance rates in other subject areas. For example, in health and social care, managers have instigated a collegiate system. This allocates all learners to a specific 'house', in which learners meet each Friday morning in their house groups for broader pastoral support. Managers timetable the English and mathematics classes immediately after the pastoral session. As a result, the attendance of health and social learners at English and mathematics classes is now very high.

What progress are governors and senior leaders making in ensuring that arrangements for safeguarding are effective, including making sure that learners and apprentices recognise and understand the risks of extremism? **Reasonable progress**

Learners feel safe at college and know what to do should they feel unsafe for any reason.

Since the merger, leaders have ensured that staff apply effective safeguarding systems and processes across all parts of the group. All staff use the same process of tracking and monitoring risks. For example, staff use an online monitoring system to record notes about learners who are at risk and track interventions closely.

Leaders have appointed additional staff to the welfare team that was in place at the Stockton site prior to the merger and have introduced a similar team at the Redcar site. These highly trained teams tackle many welfare issues before they become safeguarding concerns.

Learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism in broad terms. They develop their understanding through a detailed tutorial programme. Tutors tailor the materials that they use for tutorials based on the needs of their learners. For example, they use materials with learners who have high needs that focus on the 'run, hide, tell' initiative. However, too often, the materials that tutors use are generic and do not cover sufficiently well the local risks that learners may face. As a result, only a small number of learners can identify the local risks that they might face in their everyday lives.

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