

# Telford College

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130796

**Name of lead inspector:** Richard Deane, HMI

**Inspection dates:** 16–17 January 2019

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

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) merged with New College Telford to form Telford College on 20 December 2017. Both colleges required improvement at their previous full inspections. In September 2018, the college consolidated its estate and relocated all provision from New College Telford onto the single Haybridge Road campus.

Telford College is situated in a place of socio-economic contrasts. Some parts of the borough are among the most deprived in England, while others are among the least deprived. One quarter of residents in the region have no qualifications, well above the national average. The unemployment rate is comparable to the national average. Overall, the proportion of pupils in Telford and Wrekin leaving school with five GCSEs at grade 5 or above, including in English and mathematics, is slightly above the national rate for England.

### Themes

**What progress have governors of the merged college made to support and challenge senior leaders to ensure learners receive high-quality education and training across the range of the college's provision?**

**Reasonable progress**

Governors and senior leaders have managed well the merger of the two colleges, bringing together staff and students into one college. In a climate of uncertainty and change, they have managed the merger process effectively, creating a warm and harmonious environment for both staff and students. Governors have high aspirations for students' success and focus sharply on their progression towards careers in the local and wider region.

The chair of governors has ensured that the merged college board has governors with the appropriate skills and experience to support the needs of the college. For example, board members have the requisite experience to scrutinise the financial, legal and educational aspects of the college.

Governors have been instrumental in supporting the development of the new curriculum. The chair is the vice-chair of the local enterprise partnership (LEP) and knows very well the skills needs of the region. Governors have worked closely with the principal of the college, who is the chair of the Telford skills board, to draw up much-needed skills training into a variety of career pathways. For example, leaders have established partnerships with national companies in the heavy engineering, manufacturing and aerospace sectors. They have devised a range of courses matched closely to employers' needs. Consequently, students have relevant job opportunities in emerging career pathways regionally and nationally. Leaders are

currently finalising arrangements for learners to enrol on these new courses in the next academic year.

Governors receive useful information to assess progress towards the college's key performance targets. They use the information well to challenge and hold leaders to account. The board scrutinises students' attendance and monitors closely the proportion of students who leave the college early. They question routinely leaders' efforts to increase students' attendance and the strategies they use to support those students at risk of leaving early. Their keen focus on students' outcomes has contributed to sustained increases in achievement overall.

Governors have been instrumental in challenging managers to raise the achievement of apprentices. They have taken a 'deep-dive' approach to understand fully the issues that have an impact on apprentices' performance, such as the planning of their English and mathematics functional skills support. They support leaders' recent improvements in this area to tackle underperformance. As a result, apprenticeship achievement overall has increased rapidly from a very low base.

Although governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses – including the progress of students studying level 3 courses – they are insufficiently aware of how well students make progress based on their starting points. Consequently, they are unable to hold leaders fully to account, so that all students make the progress of which they are capable.

Governors routinely critique reports on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have a good knowledge of managers' actions to improve performance, for example through the sharing of good practice. They have endorsed senior leaders' work with external consultants to enhance the quality of improvement actions. However, they identified rightly that the information that they receive is not sufficiently precise for them to evaluate accurately the impact of these actions on students' progress.

**What progress have senior leaders made in ensuring that the curriculum offer of the merged college tackles skills gaps in the local economy, meets the needs of local employers and enables learners to achieve their career aspirations?**

**Reasonable progress**

Senior leaders have developed very effective strategic links with local and regional business groups, the LEP and local schools. They work with a variety of employers in different occupational sectors to focus sharply on the specific skills and knowledge gaps facing the region in the medium- to long term. Additionally, leaders identify skills gaps through the effective review of local market information. For example, leaders have devised a new construction curriculum that includes specialist skills for a local construction initiative that is building modular 'passive' houses.

Leaders have a clear strategy to enhance the curriculum, so that students see how their learning relates directly to their intended career. Managers scrutinise their curriculum and ensure that every programme of study enables students to move on confidently to further learning or employment. For example, leaders and managers

have developed strong links with a local aerospace company to shape the engineering curriculum to meet specifically their identified skills gaps. Students searching for a career in engineering can therefore see the employment opportunities available to them. Senior leaders recognise, however, that too few school children are sufficiently aware of the wide variety of career pathways, including apprenticeships. They have recently formed an agreement to work with a very large local academy to widen children's awareness of potential career options.

In addition to strengthening traditional career pathways, leaders have recognised the emerging skills needs in the region. They are now developing significant resources in new learning technologies. For example, they work with a highly successful global business that creates virtual reality (VR) software and have secured investment with the local LEP to establish an innovative VR learning hub. There are currently applications across a wide range of curriculum areas, including construction, health, mathematics, sport, engineering and media. Students can learn new knowledge and skills in safe environments, such as how to work safely on an oil rig. The facility also provides students with opportunities to practise using the technology and extend their software development skills for new applications. Leaders are now focused on developing teachers' skills, so that students benefit fully from the investment.

Leaders and managers have developed an effective strategy to monitor students' continuation into further study or employment. They now have information about most students' destinations and use this information well to develop a new and revise the existing curriculum. For example, managers plan training and seminars with local agencies, such as the Department for Work and Pensions. This training helps many of those furthest away from the job market to get back into work. Also, managers recognised that too few students studying construction courses moved into careers in that sector. Consequently, they have created a variety of construction taster courses to enable students to develop their basic knowledge of construction principles. Students try different skills, such as plastering, carpentry, bricklaying and painting, so that they are able to decide on the trade best suited to their needs and interests.

Leaders and managers are making good progress to improve careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) to help students make the right choices about their future careers. The principal has appointed a senior leader to oversee the quality of CIAG within the college. Most students receive a one-to-one interview with a member of careers or curriculum staff. Consequently, most students can make an informed decision about the most appropriate course for them. Managers make good use of this information to identify students who are at risk of leaving early. Managers are in the process of providing progress tutors with relevant continuing professional development to enhance their CIAG knowledge and skills to improve the guidance that students receive. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these actions on students' progress and on increasing the proportion of students moving on into their intended careers.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the teaching of English and**      **Significant progress**

**mathematics across all curriculum areas and levels of study, so that they can make progress according to their potential?**

Leaders and managers have significantly improved the teaching of English and mathematics across the curriculum areas. As a result, achievement of GCSE and functional skills qualifications in these subjects has increased consistently over the last three years and is high. Managers' actions to sustain this improvement have led to a greater proportion of students continuing their studies in both English and mathematics subjects compared to the same point last year.

Teachers have thoughtfully developed projects that have motivated and enthused students to learn new skills and knowledge. For example, students following study programmes and functional skills in English developed their English skills by exploring the theme of money while working with local artists. They were able to extend their vocabulary and practise writing skills as they described the creation of their money-themed art pieces. Based on their effectiveness, most study programme students benefit from these activities. Managers plan to extend these English skills activities to adult students.

At the start of their programme, teachers undertake an extensive assessment of students' English and mathematical skills. Teachers use the information effectively to plan learning that meets students' individual skills needs.

Teachers and assessors frequently review and assess students' and apprentices' progress. They plan assessment activities appropriately throughout students' programmes. Teachers use the assessments effectively to check students' progress. They also set students and apprentices challenging targets to improve their skills and knowledge. Most students know their target grades, and what they need to do to improve. These include calculating complex fractions and taking time to read questions. Most students gain in confidence, can describe the new skills they have developed and make good progress.

Teachers quickly direct students who are falling behind in their studies, or who have started late on their programme, to learning facilitators. These students receive the appropriate support and interventions to help them get back on track with their work.

Most students who require English and mathematics support benefit from the individual teaching they receive. Support workers use their subject knowledge effectively to help students learn and practise new skills and knowledge. In a small minority of lessons, teachers and learning support workers do not plan activities sufficiently for these students. As a result, a few students do not make the progress that they should.

Managers of the English and mathematics curriculum work collaboratively to ensure that all students attend their lessons. They share routinely information about students' attendance and progress. Managers quickly identify students at risk of falling behind as a result of poor attendance. Although much increased compared with the previous year, at the time of the visit, students' attendance remains below leaders' expectations.

Managers accept that they must continue to improve the teaching of English and mathematics for all students, as was confirmed by observations during the inspection visit of aspects of teaching in those joint English and mathematics lessons that were below the standard expected.

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