

East Coast College

Monitoring visit report

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Address: St Peters Street
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

In August 2018, East Coast College (ECC) merged with Lowestoft Sixth Form College (LSFC). The newly merged college has retained the name East Coast College. In the most recent Ofsted inspections before merger, LSFC was rated 'good', whereas ECC was judged to 'require improvement'. The monitoring visit took place to review and evaluate the progress that governors, leaders and staff have made to establish a shared strategic direction for the new college and to evaluate improvements made in the quality of provision since the previous inspection of ECC in May 2018.

East Coast College is split across two sites. One site is in Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, the other is in Lowestoft in Suffolk. The previous sixth form college (LFSC) sits on the same site as the existing ECC campus.

Themes

What progress have leaders, managers and governors made in bringing together the providers, establishing a shared vision, mission and values, identifying strategic priorities and creating an effective management structure?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the merged college. Governors and leaders have effectively used their understanding of both colleges prior to merger to set priorities for improvement. For example, knowing the financial difficulties of LSFC, leaders were quick to ensure that their finance and HR functions were quickly absorbed into the new organisation.

Leaders and governors have brought staff together effectively and established a useful strategic plan. Staff understand the plan and recognise their role within it. The strategic plan outlines the intent for the merged college clearly and specifically. Leaders have carefully defined the intent for each 'brand' within the college's structure, including the sixth form college. The principal holds regular listening groups with staff from across all sites to gather their views and address any concerns in person.

Leaders and governors have ensured that the management structure is more effective, with managers now representing the needs of all parts of the college. Leaders have invested well in staff development. For example, the principal delivers an 'emerging leaders' programme, which has resulted in staff appointments into advanced roles both during and post-merger.

Leaders have a robust performance management system in place. They take swift action when staff underperform against the clear expectations they set. While leaders have used this process effectively with staff from the previous ECC, they have only very recently introduced this to all staff across the wider college.

Leaders have greatly improved the accuracy and breadth of management information they use to review the quality of the provision. This information is accessible for managers throughout the college. Leaders have recently successfully merged the performance data for both colleges into a comprehensive, live reporting system.

The quality of teachers' practice in recording learners' progress remains too varied. Leaders and staff have effectively taken good practice from LSFC to implement more regular reporting and maintain a clear management overview.

What progress have senior leaders and governors made in establishing an effective governance structure that has a suitable breadth of expertise, can oversee strategic decision-making and quality of provision, and serves the needs of the college?

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and governors have established an effective governance structure. Members of the board of governors have an appropriate range of skills and expertise. They represent local business and priority skills areas and bring experience of a range of education settings. For example, the chair of governors has worked with the offshore energy sector, a key priority for the areas in which the college operates. The governing body is representative of both previous colleges, including through staff and student representatives on the board. The board has recently stabilised following a period of frequent changes to members.

Governors are well informed about the quality of provision. They understand the background of the merger and the sensitivities around this. They have effectively overseen the rapid integration of the ethos and culture for the new college. They challenge senior leaders to make improvements to the quality of provision and help establish strategic priorities.

Governors now have greater confidence in the accuracy of reports they are provided with by leaders to help them challenge performance. As these reports have only been made available to governors in the last two months, the full impact of this challenge is yet to be seen.

What progress have senior leaders made in ensuring that the curriculum provides for the communities in which the campuses are located, tackles skills gaps in the local economy, meets the needs of local employers and enables learners to achieve their career aspirations?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers work effectively with employers and local stakeholders. Leaders work closely with the local enterprise partnership (LEP) to shape the college's priorities. They have established an employer advisory group, in which employers contribute to and help shape the curriculum offer. For example, learners

at the energy skills centre benefit from the close relationship staff have with the industry. They can complete additional qualifications and make visits to offshore platforms, which improve their employability.

Leaders and managers are clear on the priorities for the coastal locations in which the campuses are based. For example, leaders work in partnership with local employers and private training providers to deliver an offshore training programme for unemployed adults. Leaders ensure a broad curriculum across the college that covers all subject areas, with progression routes from entry level to degree level.

Learners are effectively supported to achieve their career aims. Learners value the clear connections between their learning at college and real work situations. They develop the skills that will help them achieve their career aspirations. Most learners, with the exception of those at the sixth form college, benefit from regular contact with employers, which supports their career choices. Leaders have also introduced career coaches to support learners' transition to their next steps.

What progress have leaders and managers made in evaluating the quality of provision, starting to address key weaknesses in predecessor colleges and drawing up sound quality improvement processes?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have effectively started to take action to address the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment identified at the previous inspection of ECC. They accurately identified the good progress learners make at the sixth form college. Leaders have used this approach to implement a new, shared methodology for tracking the progress of learners across the college.

Leaders accurately evaluate the quality of provision. They have introduced better quality improvement processes, which are helping to secure improvements across the provision. These processes include performance management, data reporting and progress tracking methods. Leaders have made steady improvements to the overall quality of teaching and learning at ECC.

At the sixth form college, learners develop higher-order problem-solving skills. Teachers here have high expectations of what learners can achieve and create an inclusive learning environment in which learners flourish. Teachers set challenging tasks for learners that build on their prior learning, and meticulously track learners' progress. They intervene swiftly to ensure that learners stay on track and achieve to the best of their ability.

Leaders ensure that most learners at ECC make at least expected progress. Most teachers have high expectations of their learners and enable them to make progress towards higher grades. Staff from across the college regularly share good practice; this is effectively supported by the new peer observation system that leaders have introduced. As a result, teachers now set more challenging activities for learners, who make better progress than at the previous inspection.

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