

Solihull College and University Centre

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Solihull College's previous full inspection took place in November 2016. Inspectors judged that the college was good. Stratford-upon-Avon College was inspected in September 2017 and inspectors judged the overall provision to require improvement. In February 2018 the two colleges merged; the new college is called Solihull College and University Centre. The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the most recent inspection of Stratford-upon-Avon College

Solihull College and University Centre delivers vocational and academic education and training to young people and adults. The college operates from three main campuses: Blossomfield, near Solihull town centre; Woodlands, in the north of the borough of Solihull; and Stratford-upon-Avon. The Stratford-upon-Avon campus accounts for roughly a fifth of the full-time learners of the group. Since the merger, the governors and senior leaders have reduced the number of satellite centres, and restructured the staffing at the Stratford-upon-Avon campus.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in extending quality improvement processes from Solihull College and University Centre into the Stratford-upon-Avon campus to improve learners' progress and attainment, so that these are of a consistently high standard? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have rapidly improved the management, breadth and reliability of data. Managers accurately and comprehensively identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Managers and staff spend time on the correct priorities.

Senior managers have produced a clear, evaluative and accurate self-assessment report. They identify the strengths and weaknesses that relate to the Stratford campus and include areas for improvement within the quality improvement plan. Managers are making considerable progress with most of the areas for improvement but fail to record the progress and impact of their actions. This reduces the effectiveness of the improvement plan as a way of measuring progress towards targets.

Senior Managers have introduced more frequent and regular opportunities for middle managers to review the progress of learners and courses. Managers review attendance, learners' views, samples of work, and the number of learners who stay on courses. Where courses are causing concern, they take effective improvement

actions. For example, they have improved the quality of teaching and learning in level 2 business by sharing good practice with the teaching teams at the Solihull campus and increased attendance in catering and performing arts courses. Managers and teachers have improved outcomes in GCSE English, health and social care, and motor vehicle courses.

Leaders track and monitor the progress of learners and apprentices effectively. They have been swift to identify those who are underperforming. Assessors, tutors and teachers are effective in identifying the reasons for underperformance and, in most cases, help learners and apprentices to make good progress. Most learners are working at or above their aspirational target grade and making better progress than in the previous year. However, learners on level 3 business and information technology courses are making slower progress. Most apprentices are on track to achieve their qualification, with an increasing proportion due to complete on or before their planned end date.

Managers undertake regular reviews of learners' work and staff comments. Staff receive helpful guidance on how to improve their written feedback. Staff in sport, health and social care, and level 1 motor vehicle courses are now providing more helpful feedback to learners.

Managers observe learning in classrooms or workshops regularly. Observers provide an improvement plan to the individual member of staff and a summary of the key strengths and areas for improvement to the management team. Managers have noted improvements in the checking of learning, and the effective use of questioning as a result of this process. Inspectors observed these improvements within teaching and learning and assessment during the visit.

What progress have senior leaders made in enabling governors to have sufficient focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and progress of learners to challenge leaders and managers sufficiently to make the required improvements to the quality of provision?

Reasonable progress

Governors are committed to improving the quality of provision and the outcomes for learners at the Stratford campus. Governors receive regular information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress that learners are making.

Managers inform governors regularly about actions to improve teaching and learning in the quality improvement plan. Some governors have taken part in learning walks through classrooms and have experienced the quality of teaching and learning directly. Individually, governors have had the opportunity to review the key strengths and weaknesses identified in the learning walks via the online governor dashboard.

In April 2018, senior managers produced a detailed report on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at Stratford. Since that time, however, there has been no formal opportunity for the board as a whole to challenge senior managers on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Senior managers have produced a full report for April 2019. This is too long an interval since the previous report. Governors' actions will be too late to have an impact on the experience of current learners.

Governors receive information about attendance, enrolments and the proportion of learners who remain on their courses. In April 2018, governors agreed specific performance targets for the Stratford campus. Governors did not formally review outcomes against these targets, although the information was available within the self-assessment report. Governors did not provide senior managers with specific challenge on their performance and ask for explanations.

At the end of the year, senior managers provide governors with information about the progress that learners have made compared with their starting points. Governors challenge managers to explain the differences in performance between different courses. During the year, governors are informed of the proportion of learners who are meeting their aspirational target via the online dashboard. The dashboard is a positive development, but governors have not yet used the information to identify clear improvement actions for senior managers.

Senior leaders and governors have established working groups with a specific focus. One group focused on improving provision at Stratford. Members of this group demonstrated a good understanding of course reviews, courses that needed improvement, and those that were making progress. They challenged senior leaders appropriately.

Another group focused on improvements in English and mathematics courses. Members discussed the strategy for improving mathematics and English and provided appropriate support and challenge. Last academic year, learners achieved a larger proportion of high grades in English GCSE at Stratford.

What progress have senior leaders made in developing a curriculum for the Stratford-upon-Avon campus, which more fully meets the needs of learners, businesses and the local community?

Significant progress

Senior leaders and managers have acted swiftly to develop a curriculum for the learners at the Stratford campus, so that it meets the needs of local employers and communities. Leaders and managers have strengthened the relationships with the local enterprise partnership and the local business network. Managers have responded well to local labour market shortages in hospitality and catering. They have provided apprenticeships and expanded the range of level 1 courses across vocational areas.

Managers continue to develop courses in the cultural and theatrical sectors. They have built on their good relationships with the Royal Shakespeare Company and provided learners with high-quality learning experiences in a range of disciplines. Learners participate in workshops and real projects relating to acting, backstage design, customer care, lighting, and filming.

Senior leaders work closely with schools and local headteachers. Leaders have offered alternative vocational provision for a small number of pupils at key stage 4. Managers provide appropriate initial advice and guidance, and the pupils are making good progress.

Senior managers have improved the process for planning the curriculum. Managers consider detailed local market information, as well as the quality and availability of staff and resources. Senior managers have removed courses which were not popular, of poor quality, or that did not comply with the college's clear purpose to serve local needs.

Managers consider the range of courses available at the Solihull campus and ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication of courses. Some students on the level 3 engineering apprenticeship at Stratford transferred to Solihull to complete the higher-level apprenticeship.

Managers have designed clear pathways for learners from level 1 to level 3 within study programmes. Where there is clear demand, learners can progress to level 4 and study at degree level. Managers have been successful in developing a more inclusive curriculum. Managers have increased the number of courses at level 1. Allied to the improved security around the college, these courses now attract more vulnerable learners.

Just over half of the learners move on to a higher level of learning in the same curriculum area in creative subjects, business, engineering, and sport. Most apprentices and study programme learners continue into employment or higher levels of training and study.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by improving the quality of feedback, target-setting and in-class review of what learners understand? **Reasonable progress**

In most courses learners enjoy their learning and focus well on theoretical and practical activities. They develop their knowledge and technical skills and make good progress. For example, in dance, teachers gave feedback to learners on how to perfect their technique in the style of the choreographer Bob Fosse. Learners made significant progress during the session and most of them mastered the skill.

Teachers use questioning effectively to check learning. In an acting session, the tutor expertly challenged learners to reflect on their work and adapt the performance to make it even better. In a professional cookery lesson, the tutor used questioning skilfully to encourage learners to develop a menu for a customer who was lactose-intolerant. Within a childcare session, the teacher checked learning by asking learners to record the key points from the lesson. They then used questioning effectively to see how well they could link their learning to the previous topics of food and nutrition.

On courses where learners cannot achieve higher grades than a pass, teachers set targets for learners that encourage them to extend their skills beyond what is required for the qualification. For example, in a professional cookery session the tutor challenged learners to improve the appearance and taste of the product.

On most courses teachers provide feedback to learners that is highly effective in helping them to improve. For example, in childcare they support learners well in the use of Harvard referencing, in preparation for studying in higher education. A minority of teachers identify where learners achieve the pass, merit or distinction criteria but fail to identify why the work was good, or how it could be improved further.

Teachers have produced a very useful feedback booklet in art that includes all the developmental feedback for the course. Learners keep the feedback in one place and refer to it. This enables them to make strong progress over time.

What progress have managers and assessors made in improving the quality of apprenticeships, through developing apprentices' skills and written work and providing helpful feedback on how they can improve? Reasonable progress

At the time of inspection, 79 apprentices were in learning at the Stratford campus. Equal numbers were on standards- and framework-based apprenticeships. Most apprentices study at level 2 in hospitality and catering.

Managers record accurately apprentices' starting points and use this information to plan and provide their learning well. Assessors provide most apprentices with the appropriate guidance to help them to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for their roles.

Most apprentices benefit from routine visits from assessors who test their skills and related knowledge effectively. For example, in hospitality, the assessor questioned the apprentice on the topics of nutrition, health, safety and hygiene.

Apprentices receive clear oral feedback to help them improve their work. Most assessors encourage the most able apprentices to extend their work. For example,

the tutor challenges catering apprentices to use more complex skills, with one apprentice making their own pasta for minestrone soup.

Apprentices receive effective individual support to help them make good progress. For example, an apprentice with dyspraxia was able to discuss and present evidence rather than write reports. Apprentices who are falling behind in their work often receive additional individual sessions that enable them to catch up.

Assessors design reviews and detailed action plans to help apprentices to identify what they need to do to improve. In a few cases, assessors identify what is required to achieve the highest grades. Assessors work well with apprentices to set targets that are individual and specific.

Assessors provide feedback that helps apprentices to reflect on current practice and on their practical skills. However, assessors do not challenge apprentices effectively enough to achieve higher grades or to develop their English skills.

In too many cases, managers do not engage employers well enough in the apprentices' reviews. As a result, apprentices are not clear about the professional behaviours that they need to demonstrate and improve at work.

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