

DN Colleges Group

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

The primary focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made post-merger in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspections.

DN Colleges Group was formed in November 2017 following the merger of Doncaster College and North Lindsey College. Both colleges were graded good at their previous inspections. At the time of inspection, 5,709 students were on study programmes and adult learning programmes, and there were 1,631 apprentices.

Themes

How successfully have leaders and managers made the improvements identified in the post-merger implementation plan?

Significant progress

Leaders and senior managers have a clear vision for the college group post-merger and promote high expectations for all students and apprentices. Leaders and governors have invested significantly in the recruitment of senior quality assurance managers, curriculum leaders and teaching staff to ensure sustained improvement. As a result, the pace of improvement over the last 12 months has been rapid.

Leaders and managers are highly conscious of their social responsibility. They place significant emphasis on providing a broad and balanced curriculum which ensures that students and apprentices have access to challenging and character-building opportunities alongside the qualifications that they study towards. For example, staff provide extensive opportunities for students to be involved in projects that make positive contributions to the communities in which they live.

Leaders and governors have substantially strengthened the approach to governance. They have introduced highly effective stakeholder boards attended by local employers and local government representatives. Managers use these boards to scrutinise local area trends in employment and skills gaps that then influence the development of college programmes. As a result, managers have designed apprenticeship and adult learning programmes that provide employers with highly skilled local people to improve workforce sustainability.

Leaders have developed a highly successful management training programme. Managers are empowered to lead projects that are aligned to the group's strategic aims and that involve both college campuses. As a result, cross-college collaboration has significantly improved. Managers at each campus work effectively with their counterpart at the other campus. Consequently, students and apprentices benefit from access to high-quality shared resources and significant curriculum expertise.

How well do leaders and managers plan the curriculum to ensure that learners and apprentices make good progress and are fully prepared for their next steps?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have developed strong working relationships with regional employers. They use these relationships effectively to inform the development of a curriculum that provides students with the skills that they need to prepare for sustainable employment. For example, managers have designed a wind turbine apprenticeship with a large national employer. Apprentices can achieve the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, in addition to the apprenticeship standard, which enables them to develop essential teamwork skills and behaviours.

Teachers of vocational subjects effectively coordinate and sequence the delivery of theory and practical sessions to ensure that students understand key concepts. They regularly recap important knowledge to ensure that students transfer it to their long-term memory. Students who demonstrate sound knowledge complete more complex practical tasks to develop their skills further.

Most curriculum leaders and teachers sequence the curriculum well so that students and apprentices develop their knowledge and skills successfully during their course. However, teachers in a few vocational areas do not provide apprentices with clear direction to help them build on what they know and can do. As a result, apprentices in these areas do not have sufficient opportunity to develop their understanding of key vocational concepts.

Managers have identified useful activities to complement the qualifications that students take and to help students develop the skills that they require for their future. Teachers have significantly improved work experience opportunities for students on study programmes. They plan sessions and activities that help students to develop work-related behaviours. For example, activities such as workplace visits and overseas trips expose students to employment opportunities and different cultures.

What actions have leaders and managers taken to improve teaching practice? What has been the impact of their actions?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers provide substantial opportunities for teachers to develop their vocational knowledge and expertise. They ensure that staff are kept up to date with new technologies and initiatives that respond to industry innovation. For example, curriculum managers in engineering attended a biomass plant to learn about the purpose of the industry and the processes followed at the plant. Staff use their knowledge and experience well to design and plan a curriculum that prepares students for the employment opportunities of the future.

Leaders and managers have appointed staff to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching across the organisation and to help drive improvements to teaching, training and assessment. However, it is too early to judge the full impact on how this has improved the consistency of the quality of teaching across the group.

Managers and advanced practitioners provide effective support and guidance that helps teachers to improve their teaching, training and assessment. When necessary, leaders and managers take appropriate actions following lesson observations, such as targeted training for individual members of staff. Teachers benefit from cross-college peer support that enables the sharing of best practice.

How well do teachers in English and mathematics use the results of assessment to help learners and apprentices embed and improve their knowledge? Reasonable progress

Since the merger, leaders have appointed senior managers with responsibility for the quality of English and mathematics programmes. The new managers provide helpful training and coaching sessions for staff teaching these subjects to improve their teaching. This has enabled teachers to improve their understanding of the curriculum and adapt their delivery to meet fully the needs of their students and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have redesigned the English and mathematics curriculum. They have introduced regular assessment that identifies both the progress that students make and the support that they need to develop their knowledge further. Consequently, the large majority of students improve their understanding of English and mathematics and improve their grades.

English and mathematics teachers do not routinely use the information from assessment to inform their teaching. As a result, too many students are unclear how teaching builds on their existing knowledge. Senior leaders have very recently introduced a new assessment tool, which provides detailed information for leaders and teachers about how teaching should address gaps in knowledge. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this new assessment strategy.

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