

Blackburn College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Blackburn College was inspected in December 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

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 previous inspection.

Blackburn College is a large general further education college with one campus, based in the centre of Blackburn. It provides education in a wide range of subject areas to all age groups. The college is based in an area of high deprivation.

Themes

What progress have curriculum leaders and teachers made in using the information of learners' starting points to plan and implement a curriculum that ensures that learners gain new knowledge and skills and make the progress they are capable of achieving?

Reasonable progress

From the programmes reviewed as part of the visit, most teachers use the results of assessments completed at the start of the course to plan an appropriate curriculum for learners' next steps in their education or career pathway. Teachers identify what learners already know and what they need to learn and use this information to plan learning. Business studies learners who progress to a higher-level course build on the knowledge and skills they gained at level 2. They use their understanding of how to promote a business that they developed on their level 2 course to inform how they produce their business plan to level 3 standard. Students gradually develop and improve their knowledge of finance, business practice, marketing, planning skills and written English.

Several learners are on the level 2 business course for a second year, as they did not achieve well enough in their English and mathematics course to be able to progress to level 3. These learners are not completing an ambitious enough vocational curriculum. They repeat unnecessarily some of the knowledge and skills they have learned previously, as well as completing new level 2 units. Not all teachers in construction plan a curriculum that develops learners to extend their wider personal skills and knowledge.

Teachers plan learning programmes in a coherent and logical way. On level 1 plumbing courses, learners complete basic pipework. At level 2, learners use this knowledge and learn more complex technical skills, so they can install full heating systems. However, plumbing learners do not always receive enough technical

support in their practical sessions, which means they learn at a slower rate while they wait for help.

Teachers design the curriculum considering the needs of employers and the skills gaps identified locally. For example, in construction, a multi-skills level 1 programme has been introduced, so learners gain the skills and knowledge about different construction trades before they decide to progress into specialist areas such as brickwork.

Most teachers ensure that the content of the curriculum prepares learners effectively for their next steps in their education or career pathway. For example, learners on level 3 business courses develop critical evaluation skills that they will need as they progress to higher education.

What progress have governors, senior leaders and managers made in addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection?

Reasonable progress

The new principal has implemented an effective programme of cultural change. Governors and the senior leadership team now set clear and high expectations for learners and staff to achieve. An ethos of continuous improvement, with a strong focus on providing an ambitious curriculum, now pervades the college. As a result, the decline in the quality of education has been halted. However, the impact of the actions taken by leaders have yet to be fully realised.

Leaders and managers have effectively reviewed their curriculum strategy and rationale. Several courses were changed to ensure that they prepare learners well for the world of work or further study. For example, an information technology course was developed in computing and digital skills that included new topics such as cyber security, digital commerce, network and processing.

Leaders, managers and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and the weaknesses at the college. They have put in place successful actions to improve the quality of education that learners receive. They are aware of the improvements that still need to be made on the A-level programmes and have implemented appropriate and well-thought-out strategies.

Leaders and managers make better use of the information and data they collate to identify areas of concern. This enables them to provide appropriate training and development to teachers to help them improve their practice. For example, they ensure that teachers identify and implement extra support for learners who are not progressing as well as they should. The staff training has led to improvements in the quality of education on construction and hair and beauty courses, a weakness at the previous inspection.

The governing body has been reviewed and strengthened by appointing two new governors who have a relevant education background. Governors are now able to provide a greater level of expert support and challenge to the senior leadership team in implementing an ambitious curriculum. For example, governors monitor carefully the progress being made in improving the quality of the delivery of the A-level curriculum.

The quality of education is not yet of a consistently high standard across the college. There remains too much variance between subject areas, levels and age groups. Not all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been fully rectified. For example, the proportions of learners who achieve high grades in A levels and in GCSE mathematics and English remain low. Managers accurately identify that in some subject areas too many learners do not attend regularly.

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