

St Helens College

Progress monitoring report

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Name of lead inspector:	Ruth Stammers, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Address:	Water Street St Helens Merseyside WA10 1PP

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

St Helens College was last inspected in January 2020. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?

Reasonable progress

Governors and senior leaders have completed a restructure of the college since the previous inspection. A new senior leadership team is in place, alongside a new school-model structure that better aligns curriculum areas together. Senior leaders recognise that while fundamental changes have been made at the college since the previous inspection, further improvements are required to improve students' and apprentices' experiences, which has been slowed by COVID-19 restrictions. However, leaders feel that they are now in a more stable position to make the necessary improvements.

Governors have an appropriate oversight of the quality of provision. They hold senior leaders to account. Governors now receive detailed reports and case studies that enable them to question senior leaders effectively on actions they have taken to

improve the quality of provision. Governors describe a constructive and collaborative partnership with senior and middle leaders to improve the quality of education and training at the college.

New leaders and staff have redesigned the high-needs curriculum in response to findings from the previous inspection. Most students now follow units of qualifications that are closely linked to their education, health and care plan outcomes. Teachers and support staff identify and record clearly any specific gaps in students' knowledge and skills. Through in-class support and additional support sessions, they tailor learning to meet students' individual learning needs. However, this approach is relatively new and the impact of these changes is not yet fully evident.

New initiatives to better understand high-needs students' starting points require further development. Assessments are too broad and do not identify easily each student's specific needs under each topic. Leaders acknowledge that they need to improve the high-needs provision further to ensure that it is of a high quality.

Leaders have a greater oversight of students' and apprentices' progress and target-setting. They provide additional training for staff in the use of electronic portfolios. Staff can now track and monitor progress and the achievement of targets more accurately. Consequently, leaders can intervene quickly where progress is slow.

Employers speak highly of the support their apprentices receive from the college. The majority of employers are involved in the design of the curriculum. For example, in human resource apprenticeships, the curriculum includes the corporate values and behaviours of the apprentices' specific employer. However, in a few cases, employers do not participate sufficiently in the design of their apprentice's curriculum. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices do not develop the specific knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to their individual employer.

Leaders have improved careers advice and guidance for students and apprentices. They have embedded careers advice into the curriculum so that it is not treated as a stand-alone topic. For example, in games animation, students have 'live tested' a new game due to be released. This has given students an insight into the tasks they may complete as a games tester.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum and the careers advice they give as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. For example, most students studying level 2 programmes in travel and tourism and hospitality gain employment in those sectors on completion of their programmes. As some of these roles are temporarily unavailable, leaders have provided additional level 3 programmes to further train students before they look for a job. They have also offered careers advice on the additional skills students have developed during their level 2 programmes, such as customer service, so that students can apply for roles in other sectors.

Most students enjoy online learning and find lessons stimulating and interesting. Teachers use quizzes and targeted questioning effectively during online sessions to check learning and engagement. They build in time for students to consolidate learning by submitting work before, during and after sessions. The feedback that students receive from their teachers enables them to improve their work and make at least the expected progress with their studies.

Teachers have identified areas where students have missed learning during COVID-19 restrictions. They plan the curriculum to fill gaps in students' knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, in beauty therapy, level 2 students required additional teaching in anatomy to enable them to learn more complex anatomical concepts at level 3. Students now feel more confident in learning at a higher level.

Leaders have worked with the local authority to redesign their 'Directions' programme. Teachers deliver relevant employability skills that provide students at risk of not engaging with education, training or employment with the opportunity to continue to learn. As a result, the number of students who leave the college early has reduced.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- ensure that all employers are sufficiently involved in the development of the apprenticeship curriculum so that all apprentices develop skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to their workplace
- ensure that they develop an ambitious and individualised high-needs curriculum based on accurate assessments of students' starting points that does not solely focus on meeting qualification outcomes.

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