

Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Herefordshire and Ludlow College had a short inspection in February 2016. Inspectors judged that the college remained good following the previous full inspection in May 2010. North Shropshire College was inspected in May 2017. At that time, inspectors judged the overall provision to require improvement. In November 2018, the two colleges merged.

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 North Shropshire College.

Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College delivers vocational and academic education and training to young people and adults. The college operates from five main campuses: Hereford, Oswestry, Walford, Holme Lacy, and Ludlow; and through County Training, a training provider that is mainly based in Shropshire.

The North Shropshire campus (Oswestry and Walford) accounts for roughly 30% of the full-time learners of the group. County Training now delivers most of the apprenticeships for the group as a whole. Since the merger, the governors and senior leaders have reduced the number of satellite centres and re-structured the staffing at the North Shropshire campus.

Themes

What progress have managers and teachers made in developing and implementing a more effective process for tracking learners' progress?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have implemented a clear monitoring structure that enables them to track closely learners' progress towards achieving their target grades and qualifications. Additionally, they monitor attendance to identify learners who are at risk of falling behind in their learning.

Leaders and managers use this information well to identify learners who require support to remain on their courses and achieve a pass grade.

Leaders monitor accurately learners' progress in mathematics and English. For example, they monitor progress frequently and reliably in the individual English and mathematical skills. They use this information to help set improvement targets for learners and to provide additional support for learners who are at risk of underperforming. As a result, learners make good progress.

The proportion of learners who remain on courses and achieve a pass grade has increased for each of the last three years.

Given their previous performance in GCSE qualifications, too few learners achieve the highest grades in vocational qualifications.

What progress have managers made in ensuring that teachers use the starting points of learners effectively so that learners improve rapidly?

Reasonable progress

Since the merger, senior managers have been swift to identify weaknesses in teaching and learning. Managers are accurate in their understanding of courses that need improvement. They have supported teachers to improve, and a few teachers have left the organisation.

Managers have begun an appropriate programme of staff development to address the key weaknesses. There is evidence of some improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, but this is not happening consistently across the curriculum.

Managers have made a number of staff changes. Early signs are that this is improving the experience for learners. They now have a better understanding of how well they are doing, and what they need to improve to achieve the higher grades.

In English, mathematics and foundation studies, teachers use information on learners' starting points well. They set individual targets for improvement and provide very detailed feedback, which enables learners to make good progress. Learners in mathematics work on different tasks depending on their current level of understanding. For example, learners in English are challenged to understand and apply the concepts of inference and synthesis. Expected outcomes are different depending on learners' starting points. In these sessions, learners work with high levels of concentration and are able to clearly explain what they have learned.

In foundation studies, learners develop independent learning skills well. Learners are given clear guidance on how and when to study between classroom sessions. Learners are able to explain how they have become more effective independent learners. For example, one learner had independently chosen and correctly identified the food types for a sandwich that he would make in the next session. Teachers prepare learners well for the times when they need to make important choices without the close support of another adult.

In motor vehicle sessions, the teacher ensures that all learners have firmly grasped the basic practical skills before encouraging the more skilled learners to attempt more difficult projects. These prepare them well for employment or progression to the next level.

In vocational areas, teachers use questioning well to check learning and to extend learners' understanding. Most teachers use direct questioning well, enabling learners to provide detailed responses with a clear rationale.

In most vocational areas, teachers do not use information on learners' starting points in sessions to enable them to make rapid improvements. Too often, all the learners are completing the same task, irrespective of their capabilities. This means that the pace of learning is too slow for some learners, while other learners need more support.

In too many level 3 sessions, teachers do not set work which is at the right level. Learners spend too much time on introductory work which is too easy. Teachers do not give sufficient emphasis to the development of learners' analytical and evaluative skills. Too often, teachers have low expectations of learners and do not challenge them to achieve the highest grades.

Teachers do not use group work effectively because they do not give sufficiently clear instructions to learners. For example, they do not allocate specific roles to learners. As a result, learners are not clear about the purpose of the group work. Learners are not extended nor supported effectively in group work. Learners' progress is therefore slow.

What progress have managers and teachers made in improving learners' mathematical skills so that they pass their qualifications and are prepared for employment? **Reasonable progress**

Senior leaders and managers have clear and effective policies for the development of mathematical skills within mathematics courses and vocational provision.

In mathematics sessions and classes, all learners have an individualised learning plan. After the initial assessment of learners' starting points, teachers concentrate on developing the skills that learners need to fill any gaps. This means that learners work on different tasks and their own individual priorities within lessons. As a result, learners make swift progress in these lessons.

Managers have successfully introduced online learning materials for functional skills. They monitor closely the positive impact these are having on learners' work rates and progress. Managers and teachers are effective in supporting most learners who fall behind and need to catch up.

Senior managers have built a strong team to support the learner. This team comprises the course leader, the vocational tutor and the mathematics tutor. Despite this support, too many learners do not attend mathematics sessions.

Functional skills results for mathematics have improved and are good. Learners make substantial progress in the GCSE mathematics course both from grade 2 to 3 and from grade 3 to 4.

Managers of vocational courses have identified four key mathematical skills that they develop with learners. Tutors share these with learners and translate them into individual targets within lessons. Learners in business demonstrate mathematical skills in calculating the break-even point for a business venture. Learners in motor vehicle use mathematics to work effectively from scale drawings. Learners in animal

care estimate the benefits of buying stock in bulk, and know how to use space most effectively in a pet store.

Although vocational tutors introduce mathematical concepts, they do not explore these ideas in depth and reinforce learners' understanding of mathematical concepts in sufficient detail.

What progress have managers and assessors made in increasing substantially the proportion of apprentices who complete the qualification within the planned timescale? **Reasonable progress**

In the four months since merger, leaders have focused sharply on ensuring that apprentices taken on from the North Shropshire campus complete their qualifications. At the point of merger, many of the apprentices were already beyond their planned end date.

Managers and assessors have been effective in supporting most apprentices and employers who had been disappointed with the previous quality of provision.

Overall and timely achievement rates for North Shropshire campus improved in 2017/18 but they were still low.

Nearly all the apprentices who were due to complete in 2017/18 achieved the qualification before the end of the year. The majority of the 68 apprentices who remain are now on track to complete, although a third of these apprentices have already passed their end date. Managers and assessors have developed effective individual improvement plans for each apprentice. Apprentices are clearly making progress.

Leaders have taken swift action to improve the quality of provision. They have re-structured the assessor team. Apprentices now receive the support they need to complete their qualifications.

Leaders have identified specialist English and mathematics teachers to provide apprentices with the support they need. As a result, apprentices are making better progress with their functional skills in mathematics and English.

Senior managers have taken the strategic decision to enrol new apprentices through County Training, which is a specialist training provider that is part of the group. Apprentices who are supported by these assessors receive effective reviews.

What progress have managers made in ensuring that assessors/coaches provide regular, high-quality reviews which lead to clear actions for improvement for apprentices? Reasonable progress

Since the merger, leaders have taken decisive action to improve apprentices' experience. Leaders recognise the weaknesses and have identified managers to oversee and ensure that the quality of assessors' feedback and reviews is improved. They have also improved the regularity of apprentices' reviews, although a few apprentices have been affected by recent changes in assessors.

Managers have ensured that all assessors use the online tracking system so that apprentices are able to review their work and monitor their progress. Every apprentice has an individualised plan which helps them to make substantial progress.

Assessors indicate clearly what the apprentice has achieved and what they need to do next. During reviews, assessors use questions skilfully to help apprentices to demonstrate their knowledge. Assessors give clear guidance on how to improve their mathematical and English skills.

Apprentices value the help and support that they receive to complete their theory work. Apprentices know the skills and knowledge that they need to pass the apprenticeship.

A few employers provide very helpful feedback and coaching in the workplace to enable apprentices to apply theory to practice. A minority of employers are also directly involved in reviews. However, most employers are not as effective in supporting the apprentice in the workplace to link theory to practice.

Assessors of the small number of apprentices who are on standards-based apprenticeships do not prepare apprentices well enough for the end-point assessment. Assessors and apprentices are not clear about the skills and knowledge they need to achieve the highest grades.

What progress have senior leaders made in ensuring that the governing body receives timely and accurate information about the progress of learners and apprentices at the North Shropshire campus? Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and governors have a clear vision for the governance of the recently merged college and have recruited board members from the local area with appropriate skills and expertise.

Senior managers provide governors at the quality and standards committee with regular and accurate information about the achievement, attendance and the number of learners who leave courses at each of the campuses.

Senior managers have ensured a greater consistency and accuracy in the reporting of attendance across the group.

Senior leaders report the headline figures to the full board, and governors challenge senior leaders to explain differences in performance.

Senior managers have provided governors with an early assessment of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the North Shropshire campus. They have completed a detailed analysis of additional management information, including learner voice, outcomes and feedback from learning walks. They have re-assessed the key strengths and areas for improvement more accurately. Senior managers will present this information to the next governors' meeting.

Governors at the quality and standards committee routinely receive reports about the courses at each campus that are a cause for concern. Senior managers have reported accurately on courses of concern at the North Shropshire campus.

Many governors are involved in the validation process of the self-assessment reports for each of the college's divisions. Governors were closely involved in the validation of the self-assessment report of the North Shropshire campus.

Governors and senior managers have established reports and processes which enable governors to have a regular and accurate picture of the performance of the North Shropshire campus. Leaders are aware that there is further work to do. Although there are clear key performance indicators for the college as a whole, senior managers and governors have not yet set them for the North Shropshire campus. Consequently, they cannot evaluate current progress against a planned target.

Governors do not receive regular reports on the in-year progress learners are making compared with their starting points. They cannot challenge senior leaders effectively on whether learners and apprentices are making the progress of which they are capable.

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