

# City of Sunderland College

Monitoring visit report

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Jonny Wright, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Address:</b>	Bede Centre Durham Road Sunderland SR3 4AH

## 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.

City of Sunderland College merged with Hartlepool Sixth Form College in August 2017 and then with Northumberland College in March 2019. City of Sunderland College was graded good for overall effectiveness at its inspection in June 2016. Hartlepool Sixth Form College was graded as good at its inspection in January 2016. Northumberland College was graded as requires improvement at its inspection in November 2018. The group of three colleges is now known as the Education Partnership North East and has centres in Ashington, Ponteland, Berwick, Sunderland, Washington, and Hartlepool. At the time of this visit, 4,590 students were on education programmes for young people, 1,748 students were on adult learning programmes, and there were 1,100 apprentices and 78 students with high needs.

### Themes

#### **Since the mergers with Northumberland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form College, how well have governors, leaders and managers ensured that they secure and sustain improvements to the quality of education across all centres? Significant progress**

Leaders have successfully implemented processes for evaluating the quality of education and securing improvements across all centres. Where curriculum areas do not meet required standards, leaders implement notices to improve and provide curriculum managers with effective support. As a result, the quality of education has improved significantly, particularly at Northumberland College.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision across all centres. They use the self-assessment process effectively to accurately identify the areas to improve within directorates as a whole and in specific curriculum areas. They use a comprehensive range of information to inform self-assessment at curriculum level, and they re-evaluate frequently to measure improvements made and to identify any new emerging strengths and weaknesses.

Governors maintain a very close overview of the quality of education and where strengths and weaknesses lie. Governors with an education background in further education use their significant experience to support curriculum areas to improve. As a result, they successfully support leaders in improving the quality of provision.

Leaders and managers have improved the process for identifying weaknesses in teaching. They have used external support to set clear standards that they now use when evaluating the quality of teaching. Managers have professional discussions with teachers and provide them with helpful training to support improvements. As a result, teaching has improved significantly and far fewer teachers now demonstrate practice that does not meet the college's requirements.

Leaders put a clear emphasis on supporting staff with their workload and well-being. They have successfully reduced the administrative burden that staff had previously experienced. This has enabled staff to focus more effectively on the quality of teaching and the progress that students make.

**How successful have leaders' actions been since the merger in ensuring that the curriculum of the merged college meets the needs of students, employers and stakeholders, as well as being aligned to local and regional employment and skills priorities?      Significant progress**

Leaders and managers work very closely with strategic partners, including the local enterprise partnership, the NHS, local authorities and advisory boards, to design a curriculum that meets the north east's regional and local requirements well. The chief executive officer and other leaders represent the college on regional and sub-regional groups. They use the information that they receive from these groups effectively to inform curriculum design and to enable students and apprentices to develop the skills that they need for their career goals.

Leaders and managers at the Northumberland College campus have successfully implemented the curriculum planning process used by the wider group. They have engaged fully with the county council, employers, students, parents and staff at the college to design a curriculum that now meets the requirements of employers, students and apprentices in Northumberland.

Leaders work closely with employers in engineering, construction, health and care, and land-based sectors to ensure that students and apprentices develop the knowledge and skills that they need to meet current and future skills requirements. For example, leaders have worked closely with local universities to identify future farming skills and green farming methods needed as the land-based sector evolves.

Governors provide helpful guidance to managers in curriculum planning that successfully meets regional and local employment needs and the needs of students, including those with high needs. Governors have a wealth of experience and expertise in industry and in specialised areas including teaching and special educational needs. Leaders have recruited governors from local industry sectors with expert knowledge in housing, engineering, construction and healthcare.

Leaders and managers have worked closely and effectively with partners, including local authorities, local schools, parents and specialist advisers, to develop the curriculum for students with high needs. The high-needs curriculum now focuses on clear pathways for students and their specific educational needs.

**How successful have leaders and managers been in ensuring that students at Northumberland College who have high needs are set challenging work on vocational courses to enable them to develop the skills that they need to prepare for adult life? Significant progress**

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented changes to programmes for students with high needs based at Northumberland College. They have constructed a flexible programme for students, created an improved learning environment and employed experienced staff to support students to prepare for work experience.

Teachers set suitably challenging work for students with high needs on vocational programmes. They expect them to complete the same activities as their peers and provide a high level of support to enable students to do this. Teachers set tasks that help students to achieve distinction grades.

Managers and teachers carefully plan a flexible curriculum to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers select units that help students to achieve targets from their education, health and care plans. For example, teachers in animal care select units for students that will help them to develop communication skills.

Teachers plan the curriculum skilfully so that students can incrementally build new knowledge and skills. Students in animal care learn how to risk assess restraining small animals, including rabbits, before moving on to consider the risks associated with restraining larger animals, such as alpacas. Students become more fluent in carrying out the tasks that they need to complete in order to progress on their course and to prepare for future employment.

Leaders and staff provide students with high needs with meaningful work-related learning. All students benefit from trips, visits and activities in the on-site zoo. Leaders expect students with high needs on vocational programmes to complete external work placements. While this was disrupted due to the pandemic last year, plans are in place to enable students to access work placements again.

Parents value the support that their children receive at college to develop skills and confidence as well as new knowledge. They also appreciate the communication from staff in relation to any concerns about their children. However, in a few instances, staff do not routinely inform parents about the progress of their child.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that students at Northumberland College on education programmes for young people and apprenticeships attend their lessons often enough in English and mathematics and consequently make progress in these subjects? Significant progress**

Leaders and managers have a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of English and mathematics. They have accurately identified weaknesses, and they understand the progress that they have made towards improving teaching and what they need to do to make further progress.

Leaders and managers provide significant support and guidance to staff to enable them to respond positively to the changes required since the merger. Staff are kept well informed of the changes, and they value the openness of managers in discussing any concerns that they may have. As a result, staff have engaged well and have a clear desire to improve their teaching practice in English and mathematics and focus on improved outcomes for students and apprentices. Teachers value the communities of practice and the shared planning with vocational areas.

Leaders and managers have ensured that English and mathematics teachers are actively involved in the college's enrolment days and that they work more closely with vocational staff. Staff across the college have a shared understanding of the importance of developing English and mathematical skills. Attendance and engagement in lessons have improved significantly. Students and apprentices develop their English and mathematical knowledge and skills well.

Teachers provide students with a much-improved learning environment which is conducive to learning, with helpful resources and displays. The standard approach to timetabling and to how lessons should run is having a positive impact.

Leaders and managers ensure that teachers meet with students and apprentices regularly to conduct review meetings and set targets for development of students' and apprentices' knowledge and skills in English and mathematics. However, a few teachers do not consistently provide helpful feedback to students and apprentices to ensure that they know what they need to do to improve their work and stay on target.

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