

Birmingham Metropolitan College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Birmingham Metropolitan College was inspected in December 2021. 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 resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

At the time of the visit, there were 122 learners in receipt of high needs funding and 34 adult learners on pre-employment sector-based work academies whose courses were relevant to the themes selected for the visit.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that teachers accurately identify the starting points of learners with high needs and use this information to ensure that they receive the appropriate teaching and support to help them to achieve? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have restructured the responsibilities of staff within the high needs and foundation studies areas of the college. This restructure now allows staff to focus on key areas of responsibility. For example, staff are now assigned to different curriculum areas within the college, ensuring that any student support needs are dealt with quickly.

Leaders and managers have developed a more integrated transition process for learners with high needs who join the college, including taster days and visits to the college prior to enrolment. Learners now have a personal profile that includes useful information on the support they would like and any concerns they have. Teachers, learning support assistants (LSAs), and some curriculum leads use this information to adapt curriculum plans to meet learners' individual needs before they start their learning.

Teachers and LSAs work closely on a joint set of targets for each learner, which are stored centrally for relevant staff to access. As a result, all staff work towards the same set of targets with each learner, enabling a more collaborative approach to supporting learners to achieve the targets that they have been set.

Leaders ensure that teachers and LSAs have received appropriate training to improve their target setting for learners and enhance the quality of the high needs provision. Additionally, leaders have established a learning support assistant apprenticeship programme to develop their own in-house trained staff.

What progress have governors made in ensuring that leaders identify the weaknesses in all curriculum areas, including courses for adults and programmes for learners with high needs, and take actions that result in swift improvement? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, governors have provided intensive support and challenge to leaders, to respond to the weaknesses identified and to develop a college-wide approach to quality assurance. Through the development of a new college dashboard, which places the most vulnerable learners firmly in the foreground, governors now have access to real-time whole-college performance data, which they frequently analyse and use to challenge leaders on the quality of education that they provide.

Leaders have been proactive in ensuring that where development has been required, staff have access to ongoing professional development opportunities to support improvement. Following the development of the updated college teaching, learning and assessment strategy, leaders have subsequently launched a number of initiatives to encourage staff to develop their practice and share their experiences - for example, through 'What works and why' sessions, which were launched at the end of the previous academic year.

Governors have been highly visible in supporting leaders to further develop quality improvement strategies at the college. They have been directly involved in the self-assessment process and consequently can discuss in detail the key areas that need improvement. They have been instrumental in working with leaders to develop and implement action plans for the provision for learners with high needs and adult learners, to improve the quality of education that these learners receive.

With the support of the governors, the principal has led a restructure of the members of the senior team with the clear aim of improving the consistency of the learning for learners who follow the same course at different campuses. They have appointed heads of a few subjects, such as English and mathematics, who ensure that teachers share best practice and work closely to provide a more consistent learning experience.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that adult employability programmes meet learners' needs effectively, as well as the demands of stakeholders? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have continued to engage with employers to develop a curriculum for sector work-based academy programmes (SWAPs) that meets their needs. As a result, employers value the much needed number of trained staff applying for their vacancies. Learners are well prepared and demonstrate the behaviours and commitment that employers require.

Staff establish learners' starting points at the beginning of their programme for both their existing technical and employability skills. They set appropriately challenging targets for learners, which are focused on technical skills to support the successful completion of the qualification. However, targets for the development of softer skills, such as communication, are not set. As a result, it is not clear how much progress learners make from their starting points in these areas.

Leaders have recently invested in training for managers and staff on teaching strategies to support learners to remember the new knowledge and skills they acquire over the length of their programme. Consequently, rail students benefit from being able to recall key theories that they have learned and apply these in practical lessons. For example, they consolidate learning on health and safety working practices on rail lines, positions of safety in the event of an oncoming train and using tools safely.

Learners on rail programmes receive feedback that is developmental and leads to improvement in their work over time. For example, learners are able to extend their answers to give more technical information in preparation for assessments. However, the feedback that learners on customer service courses receive focuses too heavily on the positives and is less helpful to support learners to understand how to improve their work.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that, where academic and vocational provision is delivered on more than one campus, learners receive a consistently good learning experience? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have put in place a new cross-college leadership structure to focus on improvements. Department directors provide cross-college leadership, with the specific aim of improving the consistency of the learning experience for learners at different campuses. Department directors work closely with department heads and managers to share unified improvement messages to college teams, further reinforcing the 'one college' culture that they are aiming to achieve.

Cross-college teams work together more closely to align the curriculum in their specific subject areas. For example, health and social care teachers at the James Watt, Matthew Boulton and Sutton Coldfield campuses work collaboratively to develop schemes of work, teaching materials, align assessments, and complete standardisation activities. As a result, learners at these different campuses receive a more consistent learning experience.

Teachers value the support they receive to share best practice in teaching between campuses. They have developed online platforms to share best practice and have implemented the use of specialist software, for example in accounting, that is used to underpin flipped learning and create more interactive classroom teaching. As a result, some learners at the Matthew Boulton campus can articulate the

developments in the teaching that they receive. However, where improvements have also been identified by learners at the Sutton Coldfield campus, so far this has been less impactful on their learning.

Managers and teachers have not yet fully implemented their plans to allow all learners to benefit from the wider 'work ready, work real' work experience activities and visits. Teachers across campuses collaborate more closely to identify work experience opportunities. For example, teams at the Matthew Boulton campus are working with teams at the Sutton Coldfield campus to support the return to the pre-pandemic levels of work experience opportunities. However, the majority of learners do not benefit from the wide range of employer activities and visits available across all the campuses.

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