

Central Bedfordshire College

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	130598
Name of lead inspector:	Lynda Brown, His Majesty's Inspector
Inspection date:	18 April 2023
Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Kingsway Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 4HG

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Central Bedfordshire College was inspected in January 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. In March 2023, Central Bedfordshire College merged with the Bedford College Group.

The focus of this merged college 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 and progress in harmonising the Bedford College Group processes.

At the time of the inspection, there were eight apprentices enrolled at the college. There were 193 young people taking functional skills English, 327 taking functional skills mathematics, 366 taking GCSE English and 348 taking GCSE mathematics.

Themes

How effective have senior leaders and governors been in harmonising safeguarding across the college group?

Significant progress

Leaders have taken a measured and appropriate approach to harmonising safeguarding processes across the college group. They have reviewed policies and procedures and considered thoroughly how to create new policies that meet best practice across the group. Where appropriate, they have carefully planned areas for harmonisation, but have rightly delayed implementation until the start of a new academic year. This has allowed leaders to put in place transition activities to ensure that staff are prepared appropriately to use them confidently.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the safeguarding risks in the geographical areas where the college works. They use this information successfully to inform staff and students of the risks in the areas that they live and study. Although leaders have established one safeguarding committee across the college group, they have rightly put in place sub-committees to reflect the different issues in each area.

Leaders provide relevant and high-quality training for tutors to mitigate against these risks. They have skilfully used their extensive connections to provide training in safeguarding and welfare so that all campus staff have a comprehensive access to training and resources to support students to stay safe and healthy.

Leaders responsible for safer recruitment have expertly adapted recruitment policies so that all staff recruited after the merger are employed by the group. They have ensured that good practice from both colleges are considered in establishing new procedures.

Leaders have considered staff well-being carefully. They have created forums for groups of staff to meet, for example an equality forum, a LGBTQ+ forum and a women's group. Leaders have created a culture where staff can seek support confidentially.

How effective have leaders been in ensuring that apprentices' employers and assessors work effectively together so that apprentices make good progress at work and at college? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders at Central Bedfordshire College have taken effective action to rectify the weaknesses identified in the apprenticeship provision.

Leaders have focused on ensuring that the apprentices remaining on apprenticeship programmes benefit from a high-quality learning experience and are prepared appropriately for their final assessments.

They have ensured that senior leaders are fully involved in the continuing programmes, and that the apprenticeships offered meet local employer and community skills needs. Leaders have put helpful training in place for new staff appointed to teach on the apprenticeship programmes.

Managers have ensured that assessors and employers communicate effectively, so that the work apprentices complete at college is aligned appropriately to the activities they do in the workplace.

Employers attend apprentices' reviews frequently, so that they are involved in planning work and have a shared understanding of the progress that apprentices are making. Managers carry out quality checks to ensure that apprentices' reviews are thorough and of a high quality. As a result, apprentices are making good progress and most apprentices are close to completing their final assessments.

Leaders recognise that the actions they have taken have been focused on completion of the apprentices' programmes at Central Bedfordshire College, and that the impact on the Bedford College Group is too early to assess.

How successful have leaders been in ensuring that young people and apprentices make good progress in improving their English and mathematics skills and ensuring that they attend lessons frequently? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have given English and mathematics a high priority. At Central Bedfordshire College, leaders have taken the decision to move functional skills teaching to the vocational teams and retain GCSE English and mathematics teaching within the specialist teams. Leaders have made the decision to retain this teaching model to the end of the academic year to maintain continuity for students. Leaders intend to implement a new teaching model for English and mathematics across the group in the new academic year.

Tutors' use of assessment in GCSE English and in functional skills English and mathematics is variable. Teachers do not routinely provide feedback to students in lessons so that they understand what they need to do to complete tasks. As a result, students do not swiftly develop the skills and knowledge that they need. Students do not become confident in their own learning or make good progress in lessons. GCSE mathematics teachers use assessment effectively.

Most students taking GCSE English do not know the progress that they are making towards their target grade. In GCSE mathematics, teachers provide students with specific targets, which helps them to make good progress.

Leaders and teachers have focused strongly on improving attendance to English and mathematics lessons. They have implemented appropriate interventions, including telephone calls to students who do not attend lessons. Leaders recognise that attendance at English and mathematics lessons remains lower than attendance to vocational lessons. Attendance to GCSE mathematics has improved considerably. However, attendance to GCSE and functional skills English has declined.

Most students achieve their GCSE and functional skills English and mathematics qualifications.

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