

YMCA Derbyshire (known as Key College)

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

Unique reference number:	58237
Name of lead inspector:	Saul Pope, His Majesty's Inspector
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

YMCA Derbyshire, known as Key College, was inspected in February 2023. 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.

Key College offers courses to young people who are at risk of not achieving. They have several sites in and around Derby. Learners study an array of vocational subjects at either entry level or level 1. They also study English, mathematics and employability skills. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 55 learners. The large majority were aged under 19.

Themes

To what extent do tutors plan the curriculum logically so that it helps learners to know and remember more?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, tutors have improved the way in which they plan their curriculums. They largely focus on the knowledge and skills that learners need to develop, rather than on qualification specifications.

Tutors develop courses which are, in most cases, clearly and logically structured. For example, on digital and business administration courses, tutors introduce learners to basic word processing and spreadsheet functions before they tackle more complex tasks.

Leaders and tutors involve employers from relevant employment sectors in curriculum design, to ensure that learners study appropriate content. For example, retail tutors use input from supermarket managers to broaden their focus on customer service and teamwork. Managers from a local childcare setting support childcare tutors to sharpen learners' focus on safeguarding, and on interactions with children.

In most cases, tutors ensure that there are suitable opportunities for learners to recap and practise key knowledge and skills. They systematically plan ways to check learners' knowledge. However, in a small number of cases, tutors plan recap activities, and the newly introduced 'recap weeks', less effectively. For example, they only plan group discussions as a means of checking knowledge, which does not help them to understand learners' individual progress. Many learners on these courses struggle to recall topics they have been taught.

Learners who start courses at later points than their peers receive helpful support from tutors. They benefit from an induction, and then join an 'embedding week', in which a key focus is revision. This approach supports these learners to gain underpinning knowledge, and to catch up on work that their peers have already studied.

Tutors undertake individual reviews with learners, to identify any areas of concern that they or learners have. Tutors set developmental targets, and also discuss additional support that may benefit learners.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors have the knowledge and experience they need to teach learners the content of the curriculum?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have appointed new staff with expertise in areas where this was previously lacking, such as functional skills, and health and social care. Learners who study these subjects benefit from a greater degree of tutor expertise than before.

Leaders ensure that all new tutors study appropriate training and development courses. As well as formal teacher training, tutors also attend courses on useful topics such as curriculum planning. Leaders also focus on the development of teaching assistants' teaching and support skills so that they can better support learners. However, despite this training, a few tutors do not teach their curriculums well enough. They lack the skills to recap and revise topics effectively, or do not pick up on learners' misconceptions.

Leaders have also introduced a programme of industry placements, to develop tutors' industry knowledge. For example, health and social care tutors shadow care home staff, and catering staff shadow head chefs. They use this knowledge within their curriculums, for example through developing health and social care learners' knowledge of communication with care home residents. In a few cases, however, tutors who need to develop industry-specific knowledge have not yet started placement activities.

Leaders provide new tutors with mentor support. This provides an appropriate additional means of supporting newly qualified and trainee tutors. Through mentoring, tutors develop their approach to curriculum planning. Mentors rightly recognise that, in a few cases, tutors require additional support to develop their teaching skills to the required level.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in developing quality assurance activities which support them to improve the quality of education that learners receive?

Reasonable progress

Following the inspection, leaders scrutinised carefully the weaknesses that inspectors found. They identified weak areas clearly, and set out appropriate actions to help

them make improvements. They review these actions frequently, to ensure that they, and their staff, have an up-to-date picture of progress.

Leaders have adjusted their key managerial responsibilities so that they can devote more time to improving the quality of the curriculum. They have implemented a full and appropriate range of quality assurance activities. They use team meetings to clearly set their expectations of tutors, to encourage tutors to collaborate across curriculum areas, and to tackle issues such as tutor development.

However, in a few cases leaders and managers do not undertake quality assurance activities in a timely enough manner. For example, although tutors have altered their course planning significantly, at the time of the monitoring visit, managers had not formally scrutinised tutors' planning.

When they check the quality of teaching, leaders now focus more closely on curriculum quality, and not on tutors' compliance with basic expectations. They use suitable observation tools to support them with this. However, the written records that they produce are not sufficiently judgemental. Too often, leaders do not identify accurately enough the weaknesses they find, and do not set precise enough targets to help bring about rapid improvements.

Since the inspection, trustees have begun to focus more closely on the quality of the curriculum. For example, they request from leaders more detailed course data so that they can thoroughly check performance. At trustee meetings, they scrutinise leaders' actions relating to the curriculum so that they can be sure that these are effective.

To what extent do tutors plan and teach suitable teaching, learning and assessment activities, which help learners to develop relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours?

Reasonable progress

In many cases, tutors successfully plan and use teaching activities that help learners to understand the curriculum well. For example, in functional skills mathematics lessons, tutors use well-devised visual aids to explain fractions. Learners who study digital skills practise word processing through relevant and well-planned tasks.

Tutors mostly avoid using the weaker teaching approaches found at the previous inspection, such as allowing learners to copy information from textbooks without fully understanding what they were writing.

However, in a few cases, tutors do not plan effective lessons. These lessons lack purpose, because tutors do not give enough thought to how they will help learners to grasp key concepts. They also do not explain new topics clearly enough, and do not check thoroughly that learners understand new materials. On these courses, learners have a limited knowledge of the topics they have covered.

Most tutors mark written work carefully. They tell learners how they can make improvements through constructive, clear and direct feedback. As well as main course content, tutors also support learners when they make spelling or grammatical errors.

In many classes, tutors explain well new technical language. However, tutors do not encourage learners to take notes, so that they record clear definitions of these words. At subsequent points during courses, tutors do not consistently check that learners remember the meaning of this important but unfamiliar vocabulary.

Due to the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, the standard of written work that learners produce is not always high enough. Although a significant amount of work is well presented and of a high standard, in too many cases, learners produce written responses that are very limited in their scope.

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