

New College Swindon

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Address:	New College Drive Swindon Wiltshire SN3 1AH

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first monitoring visit to New College Swindon following publication of the inspection report on 24 January 2023, which found the provider to require improvement overall.

New College Swindon (NCS) is a large general further education college. NCS has two main campuses, Queens Drive and North Star, and a small adult education centre located in the town. The large A-level provision is taught at the Queens Drive campus, with vocational courses at the North Star and Queens Drive campuses. Around 8,000 adults, 3,600 learners aged 16 to 18, 900 apprentices and 200 learners with high needs study at the college. The college provides training programmes from entry level to level 6. The college works with seven subcontractors, who provide training to learners aged 16 to 18 and to adult learners.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to improve the achievement of learners aged 16 to 18, adult learners and learners with high needs?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have undertaken a thorough analysis of the reasons for the low achievement of qualifications by learners studying on education and training programmes. Leaders have used their analysis to provide governors with useful information on the remedial actions they have taken to improve the quality of education. Leaders now provide teachers with better support, such as useful professional development activities that focus on improving the craft of teaching. Teachers value this support. However, it is too soon to understand fully the impact of leaders' actions on the quality of education and the achievement of qualifications by learners aged 16 to 18, adult learners and learners with high needs.

Leaders have taken appropriate actions to help to ensure that more learners aged 16 to 18 stay on programme and continue with their studies. For example, leaders have increased the amount of time that staff spend with learners during the induction period. This means that learners receive a greater amount of support and guidance from staff to help them to settle in quickly at the start of their programme and to ensure that they study the most appropriate subject at the right level, in readiness for their chosen careers. In addition, leaders have redesigned the curriculum on a few programmes, such as construction at level 1: it now includes more ambitious content. Leaders recognise rightly that further actions are required to ensure that learners studying at level 3, such as on A-level programmes, achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Leaders are now tackling a legacy problem that meant that too few adult learners achieved their qualifications. Often, this was because too many learners left the programme before their planned end-date. Leaders have created a new management team for adult learning programmes. Learners now receive additional support to help them to stay on programme and continue with their studies. For example, staff have adopted a more rigorous approach towards gaining a better understanding of the needs of adults before they start their programmes. However, it is too early to know whether leaders' actions have resulted in more adult learners achieving their qualifications.

Leaders have taken appropriate actions to help to ensure that more learners with high needs achieve their curriculum goals. Leaders identified accurately that although most learners with high needs stay on course and complete their studies, too few achieve their qualifications. Leaders have put in place more meaningful professional development for staff to help them to improve the support that they provide to learners. For example, leaders have provided teachers with training on the use of assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software. As a result, more staff are more able to provide support to learners with high needs. Governors have recently increased the level of scrutiny of the quality of education for learners with high needs. However, it is too soon to know whether leaders' actions have resulted in more learners with high needs achieving their qualifications.

What progress have leaders made to improve the attendance of learners aged 16 to 18, adult learners and learners with high needs? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have taken appropriate actions to help them to monitor the attendance of learners more closely. Staff now identify learners with low attendance more quickly and use this information to undertake early interventions with learners. For example, staff use the newly appointed intervention coaches to provide learners who have the lowest attendance with one-to-one support. This helps learners to overcome the barriers that they face in attending learning sessions. As a result, their attendance is improving.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that safeguarding referrals are always dealt with swiftly? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have taken robust action to ensure that safeguarding referrals are responded to quickly and appropriately by staff. Leaders have increased the number of staff with responsibility for safeguarding so that they are more able to meet the increased demand by learners for welfare services. The safeguarding team now includes more staff with the specialist knowledge they need to support learners more effectively. For example, staff with expertise in mental health, counselling and

nursing are now working with learners at the two main campuses. This means that safeguarding managers now refer learners to the most appropriate support swiftly. Leaders recognise rightly that they have more to do to better understand the impact of early referrals on learners. They have plans in place to share their analysis of this with governors so that they can be better held to account on the timeliness and impact of their actions.

What progress have leaders made to improve involvement with relevant stakeholders in curriculum design to ensure that education and training programmes meet skills needs? Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken meaningful actions to better inform the curriculum. They have improved their involvement with relevant local and regional stakeholders. Leaders now begin their curriculum planning process much earlier and are at the early stages of using the helpful information they acquire to inform their decisions, most notably for the apprenticeship and adult learning programmes. For example, the content of the training plan for the electrical apprenticeship programme at level 3 has been well informed by employers. It now includes current methods of lighting design and a range of app-based systems for heating circuits and CCTV. This enables apprentices to be better prepared for a range of work settings beyond their current job role. The curriculum for adult learning programmes has been informed well by organisations, such as the local Jobcentre Plus. For example, leaders are supporting the skills needs of Swindon by providing training programmes that the area needs, such as training in forklift truck driving.

Leaders have developed a useful strategy to help to ensure that stakeholder involvement in the curriculum for learners aged 16 to 18 is more widespread and effective. Leaders have identified the subject areas where there is meaningful stakeholder engagement and have begun to share these examples of partnership working with other teaching staff. For example, in hospitality, employers provide teachers with information on the latest trends, including in local and seasonal ingredients and on the current technologies they use. Teachers use this information well to develop their curriculum to ensure that learners learn this content and are well prepared for modern catering environments. Leaders are working closely with Swindon Borough Council to develop training for learners who have not been in education, employment or training. Leaders recognise that there is still much more work to do to satisfy themselves that all curriculums for learners aged 16 to 18 have meaningful stakeholder involvement in curriculum design and implementation.

Leaders are now working more collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to inform the curriculum for learners with high needs. This means that suitable work experience placements are now planned for learners to help to develop their employability skills. Leaders are working with a range of employers to help learners

explore their interests. For example, leaders work with Swindon Borough Council and Project Search to provide supported internships for learners at employers such as Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Learners attend lessons in hospital settings and take part in tasks such as practice interviews.

What progress have leaders made to improve the quality of the subcontracted provision for adult learners?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have recently taken decisive action to reduce the number of subcontractors with whom they work. They now work with providers who help them to meet the skills needs of adults in Swindon and the surrounding areas. Leaders now have a closer oversight of the quality of education that is provided by subcontractor providers to adults. For example, leaders have begun to gain a greater level of assurance that the subcontractors they work with, The Skills Network, Quality Transport Training (QTT) and Wimx, are providing high-quality provision to learners. Leaders now apply the same quality assurance processes to the subcontracted education and training as they do to the programmes based at NCS. This includes visits to lessons and frequent monitoring meetings with subcontractor staff, so that they can take early action for improvement when necessary.

Leaders now provide teachers working at the subcontractors with opportunities for professional development to improve the effectiveness of their teaching. For example, leaders have ensured that teachers at QTT receive the training they need to improve the feedback they provide to adult learners. However, as this is at an early stage of development, only a minority of teachers have participated in these professional development activities, and therefore it is too soon to measure the impact on adults.

What progress have leaders made to improve engagement with employers for apprenticeship programmes so that training plans are more effective?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have begun to make the necessary changes to improve and increase their engagement with apprentices' employers. Leaders have increased their focus on ensuring that employers and apprentices better understand the expectations of the apprenticeship programmes. They have plans in place to ensure that communication between college staff and new employers and apprentices is more robust.

Leaders recognise, rightly, that they are at the early stages of ensuring that all apprenticeship training plans are meeting the needs of apprentices. This means that a few apprenticeship training plans are more closely aligned to the apprentices' job

role. However, more needs to be done to ensure that this is achieved for all apprenticeships.

Leaders recognise, rightly, that there is more work to do to ensure that the reviews undertaken by staff of the progress that apprentices make in their learning and the coordination of on- and off-the-job training are of high quality, so that staff, employers and apprentices know what progress they are making and, where appropriate, take swift remedial action.

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