

# St Helens College

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

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<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Suzanne Horner, His Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Address:</b>	Water Street St Helens Merseyside WA10 1PP

## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

St Helens College was inspected in March 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.

St Helens College is a general further education college. The college consists of six campuses. The largest is the town centre campus in St Helens. The remaining provision is at the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) Centre, the IAMTech campus, the Kirkby campus, the Langtree Street campus and the Knowsley main campus.

At the time of the visit, the college had 2,557 students studying education programmes for young people, who mainly follow vocational programmes from entry level to level 3. There were 2,157 adult students, who mostly study part time. The college offers apprenticeships to 859 apprentices from levels 2 to 7. Most apprentices study construction and engineering at levels 2 and 3. The college receives high-needs funding for 150 students.

### Themes

**To what extent have leaders and managers ensured that teachers use information about the starting points of young people and adult students to plan and teach ambitious courses?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, young people and adults complete assessments of their sector knowledge and experience before they commence their course. Tutors for young people use this information skilfully to plan an individualised and ambitious curriculum for students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Level 3 games and animation students with higher starting points are set more challenging activities in class. For example, tutors incorporate slow-motion gameplay in their work. Students studying level 2 plumbing have their prior knowledge and skills aligned accurately against the requisite knowledge, skills and behaviours of the qualification, such as the development of hand skills and the safe use of power tools.

In access to higher education (HE) classes, health tutors do not use students' starting points consistently to plan their sessions. The initial starting points of these students do not capture the key knowledge and skills sufficiently against the subjects

that students are studying. In a small number of cases, students with gaps in their knowledge do not make the same progress as their peers.

Tutors who teach English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) use starting points to set initial targets for students. They monitor the progress that students make closely. However, the targets set for students are often too broad and do not focus sufficiently on the skills that require the most development.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that young people and adults attend their classes frequently so that they remain on their courses and achieve their qualifications? Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have placed a high priority on improving students' attendance. They have weekly meetings to review the attendance of all students meticulously. Tutors and progress coaches work together closely to improve attendance and ensure that most students routinely attend their classes. While these actions are beginning to have a positive impact, leaders accurately identify that attendance is not yet consistently high across all areas of the college.

Progress coaches review students' attendance and progress effectively and frequently and intervene swiftly when they fall behind. They provide relevant interventions through targeted individual support to help students to catch up. If students miss a session, they can catch up with their learning by watching recorded sessions. Progress coaches set realistic targets for students that take account of students' barriers to learning. Many students experience additional barriers to being able to attend classes consistently, and many have been school refusers or have been persistently absent from school. The work of progress coaches is resulting in improved levels of achievement despite low, but improving, attendance for a few students.

Tutors and progress coaches swiftly follow up absences and lateness. Students know that attendance to their lessons is important and know that they may fall behind if they miss their lessons. New incentive strategies have been implemented to bring about improvements, such as free breakfasts and monetary vouchers. Construction staff have recently introduced an attendance league table, which identifies course attendance by course. This creates an atmosphere of friendly competition between courses. The quality team has now identified this as good practice, and there are imminent plans in place to implement this initiative across the college.

**What progress have teachers made in improving feedback following assessment on courses for adults and young people?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have recently developed new processes and systems to support them in monitoring the feedback that tutors provide to students. For example, they monitor results from work scrutiny to check that actions are in place for tutors who have not provided effective feedback to students. However, leaders are not yet able to have clear oversight as to whether their actions have been fully achieved.

Leaders have very recently put in place an online system of 'How2s' to support staff to develop their teaching skills. Tutors have used this resource to complete training on providing effective feedback. Managers use this system to make systematic checks on what training tutors are working on or how they are embedding their learning in their teaching.

Tutors now benefit from a range of staff development activities to improve their skills in providing students with effective feedback. In ESOL, tutors have received focused training on developing assessment, and students now receive ongoing feedback in class on the quality of their work following regular assessments. A recent teaching, learning and assessment conference developed tutors' teaching skills in supported experiments. Through this activity, plastering tutors now use voice recording technology to provide ongoing feedback to students. This is supporting students to develop their skills swiftly and effectively.

Most students receive useful and timely feedback from tutors. The feedback they receive informs them about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Public service students learn how to improve their cardio fitness levels to achieve improved scores on the bleep test. Access to HE students revisit their work and provide deeper technical explanations to improve their grades. However, in a few cases, the feedback that students receive is not always developmental enough and, in these cases, students do not make swift progress.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in providing all students with consistently high-quality careers guidance across all subjects that helps students to plan their next steps in education, employment or training?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders continue to strengthen the careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that they give to young people and adults. They have put in place a careers team that consists of people who have the qualifications and experience to undertake their roles. The careers team provides one-to-one career interviews, drop-in career sessions and group career talks for students. Most students receive the support that they need to complete CVs, job applications and personal statements for UCAS applications.

Progress coaches have undertaken careers training so that they can take additional responsibility for delivering improved careers advice to students. This enables the careers leads to focus on improving and developing the careers information and activities for students. For example, they have planned specialist careers fairs such as health, science and STEM.

Most young people and adults receive comprehensive CEIAG that supports them for their next steps. Access to health students complete a preparation to HE module and complete research on universities. ESOL students benefit from learning how to apply for jobs. They learn the meaning of key vocabulary in job adverts, such as part time and flexible working. However, a few ESOL students who want to gain employment have not yet had the information they need to find work.

Leaders and staff work collaboratively with many employers to provide specialised careers talks and high-quality work experience opportunities. They work with the armed forces, emergency services and universities to provide students with the information they need to inform them of different careers within their chosen sector. Public service students have the opportunity to attend a residential at an army base to experience life as an army recruit. In aviation, students work at local airports and cruise ports to learn about the different career pathways that are available to them.

**To what extent have leaders and managers tackled staff shortages and ensured that staff have a manageable workload? Reasonable progress**

Leaders have implemented a revised people strategy since the previous inspection. They have adopted new approaches to recruitment to reduce the period of time it takes to fill staff vacancies. Staff are now appointed within a significantly shorter period, including those in areas such as engineering and construction, where recruitment is more difficult.

Leaders have made strategic decisions to over-recruit teaching staff and have appointed more progress coaches to support the workload and well-being of staff. In most curriculum areas, progress coaches now take more responsibility for attendance and student welfare, which enables tutors to have more time to dedicate to their teaching role.

Leaders place a high priority on the workload and well-being of staff. Staff now have access to well-being days, access to the college gym and an employee assistance programme. When staff need support, leaders make swift referrals to occupational health and counselling. The new initiatives have seen a significant decrease in the number of staff who are absent from work.

Teachers now participate in a newly implemented teacher induction. They receive support from teacher development coaches to plan bespoke training and development plans to improve their teaching skills. Staff who are new to teaching

have reduced teaching hours and receive the support they need to complete teaching qualifications. This is starting to have a positive impact on the retention of teaching staff.

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