Wirral Metropolitan College

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

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Name of lead inspector:	Alison Humphreys, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Conway Park Campus Conway Park Europa Boulevard Birkenhead Merseyside CH41 4NT

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected in October 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.

Wirral Metropolitan College is a general further education college in the borough of Wirral, Merseyside. The college has five main sites: Conway Park, Twelve Quays, Wirral Waters and Hamilton campuses in Birkenhead and the Oval campus in nearby Bebington.

At the time of the visit, there were 2,377 students studying education programmes for young people, with 829 studying programmes at level 1, a further 988 at level 2 and 560 at level 3 or above. There were 1,586 students on adult learning programmes from entry level to level 4 and 699 apprentices following apprenticeship standards from level 2 to level 5. There were 219 students for whom the college receives high-needs funding.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in strengthening quality assurance and improvement procedures?	**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have restructured the leadership and management teams to bring about a cultural change in the organisation. They have put in place directors and heads of department that are empowered to bring about improvements to their curriculum areas. For example, a designated director for adult learning now has oversight of the curriculum offer with responsibility for cross-college and community adult learning provision. They identified that adult students were on hairdressing courses for too long and were not making sufficient progress in their studies. Recruitment to adult hairdressing courses has been suspended so leaders can improve the quality of education these students receive.

Leaders have improved their quality improvement processes and systems. They have implemented a range of quality assurance and improvement techniques such as deep dives, work scrutiny, classroom visits and discussions with students. Leaders use these systems and processes to help them monitor and track performance more effectively. Leaders and managers meet fortnightly to review this information and put in place targeted actions for improvement. As a result, leaders have stemmed

the decline in achievement rates and improved the number of students who attend their classes and final examinations.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have recruited new governors with the appropriate skills and expertise to provide support and challenge to senior leaders on the quality of education students and apprentices receive. Leaders have improved the information the board receives. They provide useful information on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and the progress they are making towards achieving college targets. This means governors have a clear understanding of the key strengths and areas for development. However, leaders rightly identify that management reports for apprenticeships require further development. Reports do not fully consider the progress apprentices make on their apprenticeship.

How much progress have leaders made in increasing the number of students and apprentices that remain on their programmes and achieve? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have introduced fortnightly meetings with managers to identify concerns in curriculum areas swiftly. They now consider performance indicators, such as retention and attendance, and forensically review each student and apprentice to identify causes for concern. Leaders ensure that students and apprentices have robust action plans in place to support them to improve their attendance and to catch up when they have fallen behind. Leaders have increased the number of students and apprentices who remain on their programme and achieve. However, leaders recognise that the number of young people who achieve their qualifications is still too low.

Leaders have recently redesigned assessment points so students' progress can be more rigorously monitored. They review these throughout the year to identify students who are not achieving as well as they could. At the time of the monitoring visit, it is too early to see the impact of this. However, leaders are yet to put these actions in place for apprenticeships. Although leaders have ensured that more apprentices remain on programme and achieve, they do not sufficiently monitor the progress apprentices make from when they start their apprenticeship.

How much progress have leaders made in developing an ambitious and purposeful curriculum for adult learners? **Reasonable progress**

Following the previous inspection, leaders undertook a full review of their adult curriculums. They have adapted curriculums to ensure that they are purposeful and ambitious. For example, leaders recognise that most students who study on courses such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) wish to progress to employment. Leaders have realigned these curriculums so students complete accredited qualifications in ESOL, functional skills in mathematics and employability skills. This means students are better prepared for their next steps. Managers now work closely with higher education (HE) providers to plan curriculums that help

students develop the academic skills they will need to progress on to degree courses. Access to HE and pre-access to HE courses now include the development of study skills, digital skills, English and mathematics. Nearly half of all access to HE students achieve high grades and most progress to university.

How much progress have leaders made in improving the quality of teaching in classroom-based sessions? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders now have a greater focus on the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback. They have invested in the quality team by appointing a teaching and learning manager and teaching and learning coaches. Leaders have designed and implemented an 'excellence in learning' framework to improve the quality of teaching across the college. They now use half-termly classroom visits to plan individualised developmental staff training which is offered by the new teaching and learning coaches. All tutors have clear areas for development which are monitored by their managers and the quality team.

Leaders have created an online tool to support tutors in developing their teaching skills. They include links to online platforms, bitesize training sessions and a termly newsletter. The newsletters provide key information on topics such as effective target setting, formative assessment and providing effective feedback to students and apprentices. Tutors use this platform to strengthen their teaching skills.

Most tutors use effective teaching strategies to check, consolidate and extend learning. For example, they use online quizzes to check learning and identify gaps in knowledge. In childcare, tutors use questioning skilfully to develop students' knowledge. Students use group work and practical activities to apply their knowledge in workplace activities. They consider the importance of textures when creating craft decorations. Students adjust the names of decorations from Christmas tree to welcome tree so that it is inclusive for all children. However, in a few instances, tutors do not effectively use assessments to check and consolidate learning.

How much progress have leaders made in improving the feedback that students and apprentices receive? **Reasonable progress**

Tutors use the training they have received on how to provide developmental feedback when marking students' work. Most students benefit from useful feedback from their tutors that explains what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Tutors annotate access to HE students' work, explaining how to extend their answers and use correct referencing techniques. Students routinely revisit feedback, and, as a result, the quality of their written work improves over time. However, leaders acknowledge this is not consistent across all curriculum areas. Training is being put in place for tutors so they ensure that all students respond to feedback and improve their work.

Apprentices do not receive useful feedback on their written work. Feedback is often cursory and does not tell apprentices what they have done well or what they need to do to improve. This means apprentices do not improve their written work over time.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in providing effective careers education advice and guidance to all students and apprentices?	**Reasonable progress**

Following the previous inspection, leaders have put in place interim arrangements in the summer term to ensure that all students and apprentices received careers information, advice and guidance. Students and apprentices accessed drop-in sessions in careers hubs. Assessors used final exit reviews to discuss with apprentices their next steps.

Leaders have restructured the student services team to create a personal development directorate and have recently appointed a director of personal development. This change is to strengthen the careers information, advice and guidance offer by bringing together work experience, careers and student services. Leaders are in the process of developing a new careers strategy, linking with local careers boards, schools and colleges.

Leaders have mapped careers support and activities to vocational areas so students are taught about a range of career pathways in their subject areas. Automotive students benefit from listening to guest speakers and visiting local employers to learn about careers in the automotive industry such as mechanics in Formula One or purchasing. Apprentices in adult care are aware of their next steps to gain promoted positions in the NHS trust or progress to alternative areas such as becoming a paramedic. However, leaders acknowledge that further development is required to ensure that all apprentices receive advice and guidance earlier in their apprenticeships.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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