

Mid Cheshire College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection monitoring visit to Mid Cheshire College following publication of the inspection report on 3 March 2016 which found the college to be inadequate overall. At the inspection, outcomes for learners, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. Inspectors graded three provision types; 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes were judged to be inadequate, and apprenticeships were judged to be good.

This second monitoring visit focused on the improvement action plan, improving outcomes for learners, quality improvement, meeting the requirements of study programmes, governance, and safeguarding.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in producing and implementing a clear action plan in response to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have re-written the post-inspection action plan following the first monitoring visit. The new plan is clearer, and includes specific actions for improvement that relate to weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and the first monitoring visit. It also indicates appropriate target dates for completion of actions.

The plan includes a section for recording the progress that leaders and managers are making in tackling areas for improvement, and the impact of their actions. This indicates that leaders and managers have taken many actions, particularly since the interim principal and senior team took up their posts in July 2016. These include introducing new performance management arrangements and increasing the volume of lesson observations that managers carry out. However, the plan does not prioritise the actions that are most urgent, or provide a full enough evaluation of progress so far in responding to the most important priorities for the college such as the quality of teaching and assessment and performance management.

How successfully are leaders and managers taking action to ensure that current learners make good progress and achieve their potential?

Insufficient progress

The college's data for 2015/16 indicates that improvements have been made in learners' achievement in a number of areas including GCSE English, public services, and information and communication technology. However, in many other areas, achievement rates fell further in 2015/16. Too few learners achieved their qualifications on diploma courses and level 2 courses, and achievement rates were too low in many subject areas including health and social care, science and mathematics, construction, engineering, and hairdressing.

Too many current learners are making insufficient progress as a result of poor-quality teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders and managers have not yet taken sufficient action to ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what their learners can achieve. As a result, a culture of low expectations persists in the college.

What progress have leaders and managers made in strengthening arrangements to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment?

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have taken a number of actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have appointed teaching and learning mentors whose role includes supporting underperforming teachers to improve their practice. They have increased the volume and frequency of training and development for teachers. A new assessment policy and a schedule for monitoring learners' progress are in place. However, these actions have had insufficient impact on the quality of provision, and too much teaching, learning and assessment is still weak. Too many lessons lack purpose, teachers too often use unchallenging and inappropriate activities, and too much checking of learning during lessons is superficial and poorly recorded. In a few lessons, learners quickly become bored and demonstrate poor attitudes to their learning. Additional support for learners who need extra help is weak.

Leaders and managers have identified accurately many of the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment through recent lesson observations. Increased rigour in performance management has resulted in a number of the weakest teachers leaving the college. However, managers' interventions to improve poor practice among many other teachers are not rapid enough and, as a result, too many learners are making insufficient progress. Twelve new curriculum managers have recently taken up post, but senior leaders have not yet assured themselves that these managers have the appropriate skills to improve standards quickly.

The senior leadership team have taken action to improve learners' attitudes to their study and their readiness for work. They have improved the learning environment in many areas of the college, and resources and working practices now reflect industry standards in many vocational areas including, for example, in hairdressing and beauty salons. Leaders and managers are more visible around the college, and they challenge learners to arrive on time and be ready for study. However, these actions have not yet improved all aspects of behaviour sufficiently; too many learners still do not wear their identity badges, and many continue to use the entrance of the college as a smoking area, despite this being prohibited.

What action has been taken to ensure that the college fully meets the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes, and how effective has it been? **Reasonable progress**

Almost half of learners on study programmes did not have the opportunity to carry out a work experience placement in 2015/16. Planning to ensure that all learners carry out a placement in 2016/17 is well advanced, and learners are fully aware that work experience forms an important part of their study programme.

Leaders and managers have revised the study programme timetable significantly to increase levels of attendance in English and mathematics lessons. Learners no longer attend these lessons on a different day to their vocational lessons; instead lessons take place throughout the week. As a result, attendance in the first few weeks has improved. However, too much teaching in English and mathematics remains weak, which limits learners' progress in these subjects and means that their level of interest and motivation is low.

In many vocational lessons, teachers place a greater emphasis on improving learners' English and mathematical skills, and often make good reference to how learners will use these skills in the workplace. However, written work is often not at the standard required for the jobs to which learners aspire. Learners receive insufficient guidance on how they can improve the accuracy of their written work.

What progress has been made in ensuring that governors have sufficiently detailed information about the college's performance so that they can hold leaders and managers to account effectively? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders and managers have introduced an improved system for gathering and analysing data. Governors, leaders and managers now receive accurate reports about learners' attendance, progress and achievement.

Governors are now beginning to use the information that they receive to hold leaders and managers to account for the college's performance.

The new chair of governors has a good understanding of the challenges that the college faces, and of the actions that need to be taken to improve performance. These include improving achievement rates where they are too low, tackling underperformance in teaching, learning and assessment, and improving the expectations that teachers have for their learners. The composition of the governing body has been strengthened by the recent appointment of new members with expertise in the further education sector.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented fully to keep staff and learners safe? Reasonable progress

Since the previous monitoring visit, leaders and managers have improved safeguarding arrangements, and safeguarding is now effective.

The number of staff with responsibility for ensuring effective safeguarding has increased, and an interim vice-principal now leads a new safeguarding team of four staff. The new team has carried out training activity to improve the understanding of safeguarding among all staff. This includes training in partnership with the local authority on how to ensure that learners are safe and know how to report any concerns, and training on the 'Prevent' duty. Further training to extend the understanding of staff on how to keep learners safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism is planned to take place during this term. All governors, staff and learners now carry cards that provide clear information about how to report any safeguarding concerns.

Induction for new learners includes appropriate coverage of safeguarding, and the tutorial programme includes relevant activities to improve learners' understanding of how to stay safe from all risks. A recent survey of learners' views indicated that almost all learners feel safe and know how to report concerns.

Leaders and managers have acted quickly to tackle other safeguarding concerns raised at the previous monitoring visit. They have improved security at the Hartford campus and the arrangements for carrying out fire drills. New software installed on computers means that learners can no longer access inappropriate online material. The risk assessment of potential work experience placements has a much stronger focus on ensuring that learners are safe while on placement.

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