

Redcar and Cleveland College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Redcar and Cleveland College is a medium-sized general further education college serving a mainly urban area covering south-east Middlesbrough, Redcar, Guisborough, Marske and Saltburn and the rural areas of east Cleveland. It is located in the seaside town of Redcar. Courses are available in all subject areas and include apprenticeship and Train to Gain provision. In 2009/10 the college enrolled around 1,500 full-time learners, mostly aged 16 to 18. Around 1,100 learners, mainly adults, were on part-time courses. The college trained 225 apprentices and nearly 700 employed learners were on Train to gain programmes. Around 460 school pupils were on part-time courses.

The college was previously inspected in March 2009. At that inspection, the college's overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, quality of provision, and leadership and management were all judged to be good; achievement and standards were judged to be satisfactory. Provision was judged to be good in three subject areas inspected and satisfactory in two. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the arrangements for self-assessment and quality improvement since the previous inspection?	Reasonable progress
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The college has re-designed the self-assessment process to improve its rigour, provide a sharper focus on course-level performance and increase ownership of the process by curriculum area staff. Self-assessment documentation has been standardised across the college and more closely linked to the Common Inspection Framework. Grading against each aspect of the Common Inspection Framework is now included in course self-assessment. Divisional heads have a more significant role in producing the college self-assessment report, which was previously written centrally. The improved provision of data to support self-assessment now includes standard data sets. These include data on enrolment, retention, and achievement and success rates, including those for the 10 most significant courses, to inform judgments about outcomes. However, the new course-level process is not yet fully implemented across all curriculum areas; this is planned to be fully operational in time for the next college self-assessment.

The moderation process is stronger and improved by greater involvement of external partners. However, opportunities to seek and include the views of some stakeholders fully, such as learners, are missed. Action planning has improved following further staff training on writing and using specific and measurable targets. The new system includes more frequent monitoring of progress towards achieving actions.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for learners?

Reasonable progress

Success rates have improved year-on-year from well below national averages to matching them in 2009/10. This rise is due to substantial improvements in achievement rates; retention has remained at a similar level over the period. The success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have increased each year since the previous inspection and in 2009/10 were just above the national rate. Success rates for adult learners have also increased year-on-year but they remain below national rates in 2009/10. Success rates at entry and foundation levels have increased substantially for both age groups but remain below national rates for adults in 2009/10. For intermediate and advanced level learners, success rates have improved for both age groups but remain below national rates in 2009/10. The college self-assessment for 2009/10 correctly recognises low retention as the main factor for this.

Apprenticeship success rates show substantial improvement although the proportion of those succeeding within planned timescales is still below national rates in 2009/10. Success rates for Train to Gain learners have remained broadly at national averages, although for learners taking Skills for Life qualifications they are outstanding.

What progress has been made in implementing strategies and interventions to improve the declining retention rates identified in the 2009/10 self-assessment report?

Reasonable progress

The college recognises the decline in retention rates in 2008/09 and 2009/10 in its current self-assessment report. The introduction of appropriate measures to bring about improvements is already having a beneficial effect. Actions to improve low retention rates include the more effective use of the virtual learning environment to ensure absent learners do not fall behind with their work. Frequent scrutiny of the retention and withdrawal of learners takes place and post-holiday events help motivate learners to return to college after holiday periods. Monitoring and follow-up of absent learners is more rigorous than previously. In addition, the college has a current initiative to ensure that all learners approaching the end of their first year of a two-year programme have completed and passed that stage of their programme before the summer holidays. Measures to increase the number of learners returning for the second year of their programme include summer schools and more detailed information for parents and learners at interview. College data show that in-year retention rates are much improved by around 14 percentage points for level 2 learners and 20 percentage points for level 3 learners. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these actions on overall retention rates for two-year programmes.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the support for learners including literacy and numeracy?

Significant progress

From September 2010 the college reorganised its delivery and monitoring of learning support. The process to scrutinise the progress and success of learners receiving this support is robust. It includes more careful individual progress monitoring, and monthly reporting at team and faculty meetings. Newly appointed development workers play a crucial role in the planning and delivery of learning support in curriculum areas. Most importantly they report on the small steps of progress made by learners. Timely assessments of learners' literacy and numeracy ability levels ensure that the majority of learners now receive support when they start their programme. In addition, better planning ensures that changes in support needs are met promptly and effectively. Many teachers have received training in identifying learners' support needs and are able to identify need and refer learners for assessment and support more effectively. Most work-based learners receive good individual support and coaching at work. Learners report that teachers make good use of outcomes from initial assessment and induction when planning their teaching and assessments.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the rigour of the process for observing teaching and learning?

Reasonable progress

The process for observing teaching and learning was changed significantly for the 2010/11 academic year after recognition that the previous system was ineffective. The new system involves session observations by a small team of external observers and peer observations. Both approaches enable the college to develop individual staff, to share good practice, and to improve and assure the quality of its teaching and learning. Observers produce action plans from all observations and mentors provide targeted support to teachers whose sessions are graded satisfactory or inadequate. These teachers are observed again within an agreed timescale. The new system has led to a substantial increase in the number of observations carried out and better coverage of part-time lecturing staff. The proportion of good or better sessions has remained the same at 84% with an increased proportion of outstanding and fewer inadequate observations. Fifteen of the 16 staff re-observed have received higher grades. The sample of observation records and joint observations indicate the new arrangements provide an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning. However, observers do not systematically make judgements about the promotion of equality and diversity within sessions.

What progress has been made in improving equality and diversity judged to be satisfactory in the 2009/10 self-assessment report?**Significant progress**

The college recognises in its current self-assessment report that although diversity is central to its strategic aims, further improvements are needed. Specifically data are not used robustly to monitor the performance of different groups or to set challenging targets. In the last eight months the college has substantially reviewed and analysed its approach to promoting diversity. A new diversity framework carefully measures the effectiveness of college actions. Excellent engagement of the wider community ensures that the college increasingly meets the needs of under-represented groups. For example, young carers are supported through respite services to attend trips and enrichment activities. Learner attendance, progress and retention are carefully monitored. Over the last six years the proportion of learners progressing to higher education has increased substantially by 19 percentage points to 23%. The highest priority is placed on ensuring learners are safe and are protected from bullying and harassment, with a specific focus on the safe use of social networking sites. The college has recently been awarded a gold medal by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), recognising five years of the highest attention to health and safety.

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