

City of Wolverhampton College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130484

Name of lead inspector: Paula Heaney HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 October 2012

Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Paget Road
Wolverhampton
West Midlands
WV6 0DU

Telephone number: 01902 836000

RE-INSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

City of Wolverhampton College is a large general further education college located in an area of high economic and social deprivation. The college offers courses in all subject areas. The largest numbers of enrolments are on health, public services and care, and on preparation for life and work courses. The college recruits the majority of students from Wolverhampton, with smaller numbers attending from the surrounding local authority districts in the West Midlands. Most of the college's population is White British with around 30% of students from minority ethnic groups. The college has its own work-based learning contract and provides education and training for pupils aged 14 to 16 from local schools. This year the college has enrolled around 5780 students; approximately 60% of these are adults and 53% are female. Around 47% of students studying full-time are on advanced-level programmes. An Acting Principal took up post in August 2012.

The most recent inspection was in February 2012. Inspectors judged the college inadequate in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for students and leadership and management. While the quality of provision was satisfactory overall, guidance and support were inadequate. Of the subject areas inspected, science and mathematics and construction were satisfactory with health, social care and childcare, hairdressing and beauty therapy and visual and performing arts being inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the quality of self-assessment and increasing the rigour and consistency of quality assurance arrangements? **Reasonable progress**

Self-assessment for 2011/12 has greater rigour and realism. More relevant data and information better reflect the performance of groups of similar courses than previously. Data to support self-assessment judgements are produced centrally to ensure they are consistent and accurate. Managers receive training and support to produce more rigorous self-assessment reports. Guidance on grading is unequivocal. While links between students' outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning are useful, the requirements for judging performance as good are ambitious.

Senior managers and the Acting Principal use a more rigorous process to review curriculum managers' judgements and supporting evidence, to ensure greater accuracy, consistency and compliance. Managers have yet to finalise action plans arising from the self-assessment reports. Opportunities to pre-populate self-

assessment and programme review documentation with key data and information centrally are at an early stage.

Outcomes for students

What progress has been made in raising success rates for all groups of students since the last inspection? Insufficient progress

College data indicate the proportion of students retained by the college in 2011/12 increased on foundation and intermediate level courses and, coupled with an increase in pass rates, are broadly in line with similar colleges nationally. Fewer students were retained on advanced-level courses than the previous year with retention remaining much lower than similar colleges nationally. Success rates increased in almost all subject areas in 2011/12, substantially so in engineering, construction, information and communication technology, social sciences and preparation for life and work. In most subject areas, success rates remain below corresponding national averages for similar colleges. This is due largely to low retention from the first year of advanced level BTEC diploma courses into the second year. Retention and pass rates for male students increased in 2011/12 and they are now higher than for females. While success rates for most ethnic groups increased in 2011/12, they declined for Pakistani students.

Senior managers have appropriate plans to raise success rates further. A comprehensive review of advanced-level courses for September 2012 ensures what is now on offer best meets the needs and aspirations of students and that staff enforce entry requirements. Identification of the learning support for students is now more prompt than previously. From September 2012, tutors will monitor individual student's progress more frequently to include progress towards achieving attendance targets, keeping up-to-date with course work and meeting agreed standards of work. The first of these reviews takes place this month. Students spoken to on the monitoring visit are clear of the purpose of the review meetings and welcome the opportunity to discuss their progress. Senior managers are focussing sharply and more regularly on monitoring the performance of subject areas to identify areas for improvement and intervention more promptly. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of the range of actions put in place to raise success rates for all groups of students.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

How much progress has the college made in ensuring that teaching meets the needs of individual students?

Reasonable progress

Senior managers were aware that lesson observation procedures were providing grades which were overly optimistic. They have improved observations to include both a no-notice graded observation and a developmental observation which is not graded, but provides teachers with the opportunity to provide additional information about the session, including a sample of assessed work. It is too early to assess the overall effectiveness of these new style observations, but those which managers have already completed have helped them and teachers identify specific areas where teaching and learning need improving. Managers have organised staff development to match these needs, including sessions on lesson planning, meeting individual students' needs and developing thinking skills. Students say that they enjoy their lessons and feel they learn much from well-organised group work activities. However, a minority believe that teachers talk too much and do not give them sufficient time to develop ideas with their peers.

What progress has been made in better preparing students for their courses through initial advice and guidance and supporting them more effectively through tutorials?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, concerns about initial advice and guidance centred on the quality of information that students receive from subject staff rather than from admissions staff. Inconsistent application of former procedures between different subject areas often resulted in students being placed on courses which were too demanding for them, and with insufficient support to help them make progress.

Senior managers have introduced a new, simplified admissions policy and underpinning quality standards. Managers and staff have tested and evaluated the new arrangements and these are in place for the 'Next Steps' week in November 2012, which deals with late applications to the college. Interviewers drawn from subject areas are currently receiving additional training to help them improve their skills.

The procedures for setting progress targets for students are much better. Students understand the procedures and those spoken to by inspectors knew what their targets for improvement were. Senior managers have also introduced a system of review weeks throughout the year to ensure that tutors monitor progress accurately and consistently at individual tutorials.

Leadership and management

What progress have governors made in ensuring they are fully aware of the educational and financial performance of the college and in holding managers to account?

Reasonable progress

The Acting Principal and governors have a strong working relationship. Reports to the governors are now accurate and informative and provide them with a sound framework to monitor the work of the college. Governors and senior managers have agreed key performance indicators for all of the main aspects of the college's work. Senior managers provide governors with clear indications of the college's performance against the indicators. Governors have a clear understanding of the financial position of the college and its academic standards. Plans are in place to provide a more coherent framework of key performance indicators, strategic planning, performance management and the quality of the college's provision.

What progress has been made towards improving the effectiveness of the health and social care, hairdressing and beauty therapy and visual and performing arts subject areas?

Insufficient progress

Since the last inspection, appropriate actions to respond to the areas for improvement are underway. Managers have strengthened initial advice and guidance so that students are recruited to courses which best meet their abilities and interests. For example:

- applicants for early years courses undergo Criminal Records Bureau checks much earlier than previously so that work placements take place in the first few weeks of their courses
- the career aspirations of applicants for advanced-level arts course receive more careful assessment to establish if one-year or two-year courses are most suitable
- applicants for hairdressing courses and their parents attend taster days in the salons and hairdressing academy so they are clear what to expect regarding standards of work, responsibilities and appearance.

Management changes in the hairdressing and beauty therapy and health and social care subject areas are having a positive impact on improving communication, teamwork and ensuring staff are clear of what needs to improve. Cross-college development activities enable staff to attend training on college priorities, such as the tracking of students' progress and the use of data in judging performance, as well as providing opportunities for subject teams to review students at risk of leaving the college more promptly. Managers and staff monitor students' progress more regularly and rigorously. More timely monitoring is resulting in improved attendance compared to a similar time last year. Since many improvement actions are at an early stage it is too early to judge their impact on students' outcomes.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for students of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2012