

Leeds City College

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

In September 2013 the college started to offer full-time provision for students aged 14 to 16 to enable them to complete a Key Stage 4 equivalent programme as an alternative to school or home-based education. This monitoring visit examined the progress made to date against the themes identified in this report and is focused solely on the new 14 to 16 full-time provision.

At the time of the visit, 20 students were enrolled from local secondary schools. Many of the students enrolled have a history of poor attendance and behaviour during their Key Stage 3 education. Eleven students were enrolled in Year 11 and nine in Year 10. Students follow a core curriculum from Monday to Thursday and study vocational options on Friday.

Themes

What progress has the college made in implementing clear admissions and exclusion policies for its 14 to 16 provision?

Significant

The college has established clear and comprehensive admission policies and procedures for the full-time 14 to 16 provision. Managers have developed and refined the admissions policy in line with the vision for the academy to support students' progression into apprenticeships and other work-based progression routes. Parents and students understand admissions procedures clearly. Pre-enrolment events and information avail parents and students of the opportunity to visit the college and better understand the organisation and content of provision and progression opportunities. Staff hold one-to-one meetings with prospective students to discuss their application, expectations and support needs. Good working relationships have been established with schools and Leeds City Council to develop the apprenticeship academy. The college has drawn well on the expertise already well established through the 14 to 16 partnership team and the extensive part-time vocational provision already offered to pupils aged 14 to 16.

Managers recognise that they need to improve how they work with schools and the local authority to collect data about the previous educational attainment of each student. A range of initial and diagnostic assessments to provide a baseline against which to measure students' progress is in place.

Clear and well-focused behaviour and discipline policies and procedures have been established. An exclusion policy is in place and applied appropriately. The number of

permanent exclusions has reduced from three in the first term to none subsequently. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced from 17 days per month at the end of the autumn term to two per month currently. Staff report all exclusions to the local authority. Policies and strategies on behaviour and exclusion are shared and understood by parents and students. Managers have established a well-defined anti-bullying and antisocial behaviour policy, which is embedded well across all provision. The student voice is used well to inform on behaviour codes and the rewards system.

Parents and carers have signed appropriate consent and indemnity forms, which staff use appropriately for college trips and other off-site activities. Contact with parents and carers is at a high level, including immediate contact in the case of absence. Staff make home visits in the case of persistent issues with attendance. In addition, staff now attend all multi-agency meetings related to students' families or individual circumstances and work closely with social workers where appropriate. Developing links with parents are ensuring a positive attitude to the provision and to the progress and achievements that students have made.

What progress has the college made in providing sufficient, appropriately qualified staff to lead and teach the provision and to support the learners?

Significant

All teachers have qualified teacher status and some have secondary school experience. Teachers have relevant subject and vocational experience and expertise. The core teaching team has been established largely from existing staff and has been reshaped, particularly during the first term, to ensure the suitability of staff in meeting the needs and challenges of the cohort. The team is becoming stronger and more effective as teachers develop their skills to meet students' specific needs, particularly in improving students' attitudes to learning. The vocational aspects of the curriculum are taught by experienced teachers, many of who have had significant experience of teaching this age group, through the well-established programme of day-release education for students aged 14 to 16. Vocational teachers have industrial and work-related experience, which is used well to focus students on higher aspirations and progression opportunities. Effective systems ensure the sharing of good practice. The relatively recent appointment of two senior staff with specific managerial experience of secondary education has strengthened the leadership of the provision.

Staff have had effective training in motivational strategies to deal with challenging behaviour. Regular team meetings allow them to review students' progress and plan appropriate intervention where necessary. Teaching and learning benefit from a wide range of highly skilled support staff who enhance the learning of students through group and one-to-one intervention activities. The introduction of progress coaches and learning mentors has strengthened learning support systems further. Learning and pastoral support are built into individual students' learning plans. Teaching

assistants are highly committed although not always effectively deployed to support and embed learning.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that the curriculum is sufficiently broad and covers all statutory subjects?

Reasonable

Students follow a core curriculum on four days of the week. The core consists of English, mathematics, science, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT), enterprise and workshop skills and personal, social, health and economic education. Study clubs at the end of the day support the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills further. On Fridays students work in vocational areas, which include health and social care, construction skills, hairdressing, hospitality, sport, and business. Students speak very positively about their work and the progress they are making in the vocational areas. They are less positive about how they viewed the 'intensity' of the core curriculum across four days. Most students are making progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and much has been achieved since the inception of the programme in September. However, the literacy and numeracy skills developed in the vocational area are not sufficiently integrated into the core subjects and students sometimes fail to see the relevance that these have to their learning and future progression. The college is aware of this and plans a significant review of the design of the curriculum for September 2014.

The academy has a well-structured programme for personal, social, health and economic education which includes religion and values, building communication skills, understanding and developing relationships, promoting safety consciousness and citizenship awareness. Staff embed equality and diversity well across the curriculum and promote healthy life styles. All students take a work skill qualification and follow a comprehensive employability programme. Through the enterprise curriculum, staff encourage students to understand the world of work and business enterprise. They participate in enterprise activities across Leeds and this has contributed to their understanding of entrepreneurial skills. A wide range of motivational speakers have visited the academy and their participation has been welcomed enthusiastically by students. A diverse enrichment programme includes art lessons, business and enterprise challenges, outdoor pursuits and excursions to places of interest and theatres. The physical education programme has insufficient breadth. The religious education and values programme requires further development. Managers are aware of these issues and the content, breadth and time allocation given to these programmes is under review for the next academic year.

What progress has the college made in quality assuring and evaluating all aspects of the provision for continuous improvement?

Reasonable

Managers ensure that the well-established and robust quality assurance procedures, implemented across the mainstream college provision, are applied to the 14 to 16 full-time provision. For example, teachers have regular observations, including through senior managers' learning walks. Each teacher has a detailed individual action plan which states clear priorities for improvement leading to specific actions and includes target dates and a self-assessment of progress. These are reviewed by senior managers regularly. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress are comprehensive. Staff conduct initial assessment tests in English and mathematics at enrolment to ascertain students' levels and where additional support is required. Progress tracking is thorough including that for students known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The college has effective systems in place to monitor attendance. Students' attendance, set against their historical records, has improved significantly. Generally, students recognise that the college provides a supportive, inclusive and safe environment and this is evidenced further through improving attendance levels. The majority of students understand their targets and current progress levels. A minority of students are less sure of the progress they have made in both the core subjects and in their behaviour and attitudes.

Managers have not yet ensured consistency in some aspects of quality assurance and how well systems have an impact on classroom practice. The productive and focused use of teaching assistants is too variable across the provision. Teaching assistants do not always work with the necessary autonomy in making key decisions on how best to support students in lessons. In addition, inconsistency between different teachers exists in the application of the behaviour code. Staff do not challenge the most able students sufficiently and consequently the pace of their improvement is slowed. The college recognises these inconsistencies and work is in progress to resolve them.

What progress has the college made in providing learners with sufficient student care, guidance and support, including the implementation of a behaviour policy appropriate for learners aged 14 to 16?

Significant

Student support systems are strong and effective. Many students who enrolled came with a historical record of poor attendance and behaviour. This had an impact on their attitude to learning and the progress that they had made during Key Stage 3. Students commented to inspectors how they were often absent from school or when attending were placed in 'isolation'. The college has in place effective support mechanisms to help with individual students' issues and to tackle a negative view of formal education. Students have good additional learning support. Staff are highly

committed to ensuring that all students have opportunities to make the best progress they can. Increasingly effective links with parents are contributing to more positive students' attitudes to learning. Careers guidance is a strength and many students have developed clear progression pathways and now see a purpose in pursuing education and vocationally related skills development. Careers guidance is built into timetabled weekly sessions with all Year 11 students. Staff organise work placements for all Year 10 students. The student progress manager ensures that students have an individualised plan that caters for their academic and pastoral needs and identifies the support required. Close liaison with external support services informs case studies and reviews of individual students' support needs and progress.

During the first few months the academy faced significant issues with regard to the behaviour of students. Approaches and strategies had to be revised. Much support has been applied to establishing better behaviour and a more conducive environment for learning. New staff, with significant management experience at secondary level, are now in post. Staff training was refocused with a strong emphasis on behaviour management and active learning strategies. The behaviour policy was refined to take greater account of staff experience and students' views. For example, staff reduced the number of rules and linked them clearly to the warnings students receive for disciplinary issues. They placed a greater focus on the use of rewards and positive reinforcement to support improving students' attitudes. Staff now use rewards well to acknowledge good achievement and performance and many students value these highly. Behaviour has improved significantly. While there are occasional examples of disruptive behaviour these are dealt with quickly and effectively and in a manner that does not disrupt the learning of others. Daily registration, attendance and absence checks are effective. Students have a supervised breakfast club each morning. Dedicated support is available as are counselling and specialist advice opportunities.

Has the college implemented appropriate measures to ensure that all learners are reasonably safeguarded and that it meets its statutory duty for safeguarding in relation to learners of this age group?

Yes

The college complies with its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and child-protection legislation. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding and health and safety training. They also receive additional specialist training in the use of physical intervention and control techniques to deal with incidences of aggression or in dealing with threatening behaviour. Statutory requirements in terms of recruitment checks are met and a single central record is in place. Risk assessments are in place and hazards are identified both in relation to the academy core provision and also for the vocational provision. However, in a very few cases, important control measures, such as the safeguards put in place when students use the changing rooms at an external sports centre are not recorded sufficiently formally. Staff refer frequently to important aspects of students' personal safety, for example the importance of keeping their personal identity secure when using the internet.

The academy teaching area is secure with access restricted to the academy staff team. Within the area, a common room and ICT room provide students with social space and the opportunity to work independently during their breaks. Staff supervise students closely around the college and accompany them when they travel to other college sites for vocational provision. Staff and students are identifiable through colour-coded lanyards. Supervising staff have developed good relationships with the students alongside reinforcing the behaviour code and being alert to signs of potential concerns arising. The staff team communicates very effectively and has ensured that students can benefit from the wide range of the college's support services, for example, several students have made use of counselling services.

Strengths and areas of weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Teachers know their students very well and have used initial assessments carefully to establish an accurate baseline from which to measure their progress. They use a range of different approaches when teaching, including some good use of technology, for example using mobile phones to vote on topics.

Teachers are adapting their strategies quickly and effectively to remove barriers to learning where they exist. For example, the revised and simplified approach to dealing with behaviour issues has allowed teachers to implement rewards and sanctions quickly and effectively, and reduce the extent to which students' behaviour disrupts learning.

Teachers use seating plans constructively and consistently to help improve students' attitudes to learning and to support productive pair or small group work. However, in a minority of lessons teachers do not structure their work carefully enough, for example, in guiding students in how to carry out group work productively, sticking to timescales that are set, or in allowing sufficient time for students to articulate and consolidate their learning.

Teachers use praise to motivate and engage students. Most lessons are well paced. Very occasionally, aspects of lessons are rushed with the consequence that students do not have the opportunities to consolidate their learning. In a very well-paced mathematics lesson students developed their understanding of equations with enthusiasm.

In a number of lessons the more able students were not sufficiently challenged. Lesson planning did not take account of how to engage and challenge the more able. Too often students completed the tasks quickly and became bored.

Opportunities were missed to involve teaching assistants as additional support for these students. Sometimes the joint work between teaching assistants and teachers, while very supportive, is not sufficiently planned to achieve maximum impact in support and learning.

Teachers are increasingly using formative assessment appropriately. They mark students' work regularly. However teachers' comments on marked work do not always point to the next step of development for students. In some exercise books there is little evidence of teachers' following up to assess improvement and chart students' progress.

The promotion of literacy and numeracy within lessons is variable. Students are positive about reading aloud. Good examples of productive pair work were observed. In many lessons recapping on subject terminology was applied well. However, the link and reinforcement between literacy and numeracy application in the vocational subjects and core teaching are not sufficiently embedded. Classrooms and the core area have insufficient examples of students' work on display.

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