

Barnfield College

First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Barnfield College following publication of the inspection report on 8 January 2015 that found the provider to be inadequate overall.

The new principal, a permanent appointment, will take up his post on 2 February, 2015 at which point the interim principal will leave. The current vice principal, curriculum and planning, will have left the college by 2 February.

Themes

Improvement in learner management

The interim principal and senior managers acknowledge their immediate priority is to improve students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Managers firmly believe that by improving these aspects, they will have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers audited all processes and procedures associated with the monitoring of behaviour, attendance and punctuality. They indicate that suitable processes and systems are in place to identify, record and take action on poor student behaviour, absence or lateness.

Tutors ensure students are aware of college expectations and, during their induction, students sign to confirm they recognise the importance of suitable behaviour and good, timely attendance. Programme area teams receive weekly reports on absence or lateness and take appropriate actions to follow up those students whose attendance and punctuality drop below an acceptable level. Managers acknowledge that programme teams were previously not having sufficient impact on raising standards.

Since the inspection, to help improve behaviour around the college, managers have drawn up a rota to increase the presence of duty staff around the college, particularly at the busiest times of the day. The guidance covering the activity requires duty staff to interact with students, promote appropriate behaviour, encourage students to wear identity badges at all times, ensure students to move to lessons on time, reduce litter, and urge students to respect the college environment. Senior managers have also sought advice to help improve the quality of security around the college, and have taken action to deal with any shortcomings identified as part of an audit of the college estate.

Priorities for improvement

- Senior managers should ensure all staff understand the importance of using college systems effectively to monitor and improve attendance, punctuality and behaviour.
- Reinforce to all students their responsibilities and establish a zero tolerance approach to poor attendance, punctuality and behaviour around the college.
- Review the impact and effectiveness of changes, and take actions to improve systems and procedures if required.

Improvement in teaching, learning and assessment

Since the inspection the majority of initiatives to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have focused too much on improving internal quality review processes, including carrying out further programme area reviews and providing training to the lesson observation team. Managers have not focused sufficiently on key weaknesses identified in the inspection report or identified those strategies that might have the biggest impact on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Priorities for improvement

- Use the key recommendations from the inspection report to develop strategies that will bring about the greatest and most rapid improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Identify key managers able to take responsibility for these strategies against a pre-determined timeline and action plan.
- Provide targeted training and support to teachers, to give them the tools and skills they need to improve the quality of their work. Draw ideas, for example, from other partner providers, from good practice materials, from specialist advisers, or other available resources.
- Create opportunities to share good practice internally, encourage staff to take a more active interest in raising the quality of their teaching, and seek opportunities for recognising and celebrating the most innovative and successful improvement strategies.

Improving the teaching and learning of English and mathematics in discrete classes and within subjects

Since the inspection, managers have started to identify and deal with weak teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics. A new manager now has direct responsibility for improvements in this area. The manager has realigned responsibilities across the curriculum areas, reviewed staffing requirements and developed a detailed quality improvement action plan for the area. The manager acknowledges that suitably skilled staff are now in post. Lead lecturers are carrying out a full review of schemes of work to ensure they are fit for purpose. Managers have identified information technology packages to enhance the teaching of English and mathematics, and staff have received training on how to use these new resources.

Managers have identified suitable priorities and designed thematic staff training that is yet to be delivered. Managers intend to use this training to re-engage students and staff, and reinforce the importance of these core skills. Managers are actively encouraging staff to share their insights and initiatives in meetings and through on-line discussion boards. They have also started to consider longer-term strategies to improve the quality of delivery of more generic literacy and numeracy skills in vocational lessons.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure managers maintain the momentum and clear focus on raising the quality of provision in English and mathematics, in line with the action plan.
- Frequently review the impact and effectiveness of improvement strategies, and take actions to improve systems and procedures if required.

Improving the quality and accuracy of self-assessment

The chair of governors, interim principal and managers acknowledge that current arrangements are interim, until the new principal joins the college. Governors and the interim principal have prioritised attempts to improve learners' experiences at college, and to that end have promoted a whole-college approach to behaviour, preparation for lessons, attendance and punctuality.

A new management information system is to be introduced that will give leaders, managers, tutors and teachers improved access to data on student activity and performance. Data on punctuality, attendance and retention are being reviewed at weekly programme area, management, and senior leader meetings. Training and development for managers are taking place frequently and focus on key priorities, to support those appointed since the most recent restructure.

Quality improvement planning is in transition, until the new principal is in post. While the whole college quality improvement plan is linked to areas for improvement identified at the inspection, it is not clear in many cases what the targets are, such as for attendance and retention. It is also unclear what the progress to date is. Data provided at the visit do not show a close correlation between attendance and retention, and learner numbers in each dataset differ. Attendance in English and mathematics classes is poor. Programme area quality improvement plans reviewed at this visit do not align closely to the college quality improvement plan. The apprenticeship manager is already working with the new principal to improve the poor apprenticeship performance and communicate improvement measures to the funding agency.

Priorities for improvement

- As a matter of urgency, agree whole college and programme area targets, and communicate these to staff to accelerate improvement and tackle underperformance.
- Ensure that targets set are sufficiently challenging and measurable and that individual managers are given clear responsibility for milestones and interim targets.
- Urgently review the accuracy of attendance and retention data and measure the impact of recent actions to improve students' experiences. Use the outcomes of these steps to inform self-assessment and further improvement planning.
- Review performance at team, directorate, senior leadership and governor level, ensuring that actions to improve performance are well understood, rapidly implemented, and carefully monitored. Ensure that individuals receive appropriate support to make improvements.
- Support programme area leaders to improve standards across all programme areas through effective mentoring and development.

Improving arrangements for work experience

Programme area leaders are clear about their responsibilities to organise and arrange work experience for students on study programmes, supported by the health and safety officer to ensure that students are safe. Good practice exists in a number of programme areas, and programme area leaders are increasingly working together to share contacts and opportunities for work experience placements. However, further work is needed across the college to ensure that all students can benefit from work experience or placements.

The current work experience policy does not clearly identify the skills students need to develop, nor are the current evaluation and placement forms useful in enabling students, teachers and employers to identify targets students should achieve. Work

experience is not linked clearly to students' study programmes and to the broader skills needed to achieve their goals and aspirations.

It is not clear who has the strategic lead for the study programmes, to ensure work experience is completed, nor is it clear what each student should expect as their minimum entitlement. Consequently senior leaders are unable to monitor where work experience is happening, or how students are making progress to improve the skills and attitudes they need for employment.

Priorities for improvement

- As a matter of urgency, identify a manager to provide strategic leadership on the study programmes components.
- Improve the work experience policy and procedure so they focus on the skills students need to develop to reach their goals. Make use of existing good practice in the sector to inform changes.
- Better record the work experience and work-related activity students undertake so that tutors, senior leaders and governors can monitor and measure progress and identify and celebrate success.

Improvement in the collection of destination data to inform curriculum planning

At the previous inspection only 40% of learners' destinations were known. Tutors now routinely capture and record students' intended destinations during progress reviews. Lead lecturers within programme areas have responsibility for using this information more effectively during tutorials, in discussions with students, and when reviewing and setting targets. Managers are considering the use of a commercial contractor to contact students and track destinations at the end of courses.

Managers have not stated clearly how they will use destination data to benefit students and inform curriculum planning or change. Destination data do not link sufficiently to programmes of study or clearly determine the skills students need to develop for career success.

Priorities for improvement

- Urgently ensure that tutors use intended destination data to plan individualised programmes of study and learning targets that will meet students' needs and help them achieve their career goals. Ensure that progress reviews are used effectively to monitor progress against learning targets.
- Ensure destinations data are analysed to inform future curriculum planning and change, particularly if students are not choosing to stay at the college to progress to the next level.

- Recorded and use intended destination information and initial assessment outcomes of all new students to plan their learning and development more effectively.

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