

Barnfield College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third follow-up reinspection monitoring visit to Barnfield College following publication of the inspection report on 8 January 2015 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Since the first visit, the new Principal has commenced his appointment and, following a restructure of management posts, most of the new senior leadership team are in post.

Themes

Improvement in learner management

significant progress

Learners' behaviour and conduct in lessons, in corridors and in social spaces has improved considerably. Learners now show each other, staff and their surroundings greater respect. The vast majority wear their identity cards and those not doing so comply promptly with requests from staff to display them. In the majority of lessons, learners participate in the activities set with enthusiasm and they enjoy their learning. In a very small minority of lessons, learners talk over each other and over the teacher, especially when the pace of the lesson slows and they are not clear what it is they need to do.

Learners' attendance and punctuality at lessons have improved significantly. Although a few learners are late to a minority of lessons, rates of attendance are high in most subject areas. However, attendance at lessons for English and mathematics qualifications is lower than the college average and still requires further improvement.

In 2014/15, the proportion of learners who achieved their qualifications improved by about six percentage points. The improvements made in the management of learners helped teachers and managers to focus on supporting learners to achieve, despite a poor start to the academic year.

Managers have improved their monitoring of the progress that apprentices make. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who complete their framework has increased considerably, from a very low base in 2013/14.

Support for learners has improved with the introduction of 'The Hub', which provides a location in the centre of the New Bedford Road campus for learners to access a wide range of help and support for their learning. A similar facility has also been established at the Enterprise Way site.

Governors have increased the level of challenge they give to senior leaders about the effectiveness and impact of learner management. They ask more probing questions and also ask for additional evidence when they require greater detail. They understand well the challenges managers face in improving the provision and the actions needed to achieve this.

Improvement in teaching, learning and assessment

reasonable progress

A new manager for improving teaching, learning and assessment has been appointed and has very recently commenced work. Managers have appointed several staff to advanced practitioner posts to help support improvements to teaching, learning and assessment. These changes are yet to have sufficient impact as too much teaching and learning does not enable all learners to make the progress of which they are capable. However, the expectations that teachers have of their learners has increased and the quality of lessons has improved overall.

New performance management and development arrangements have been introduced for teaching staff and further professional development in teaching and learning is planned for the near future.

The quality and effectiveness of the advice and guidance that learners receive from college staff when they enrol at the college have improved and more learners are starting on courses at an appropriate level for their prior achievement, abilities and aspirations. The proportion of learners who have transferred to courses at different levels and to different subjects has declined this academic year.

The feedback that learners receive from teachers on their written work is improving and managers are monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teachers' feedback more often. While much feedback is supportive and encouraging, too much feedback does not accurately highlight to learners what they have done well and what they need to do to improve further.

Improvement in teaching and learning of English and mathematics in discrete classes and within subjects

reasonable progress

Senior managers have maintained a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics with a root and branch overhaul of all aspects of this provision, but the impact of the very many improvement actions is limited as they are mostly at a very early stage. New specialist English and mathematics teaching staff have started in post from this September; the number of full-time teaching staff in these subjects is now close to college requirements. Two new senior managers have been appointed, although each has been in post only a few weeks.

One notable improvement is a substantial rise in learners' attendance and punctuality at English and mathematics sessions, although each still requires further improvement. Students now generally demonstrate a positive attitude to studying English and mathematics and can articulate the importance of learning in these subjects. The number of learners taking English and mathematics courses is substantially higher than the previous year.

The quality of teaching and learning observed by inspectors in GCSE and functional English and mathematics sessions is not good enough and too much requires improvement. Teachers are not yet planning teaching well enough to support and develop each student's full potential. In some cases this was because teachers were still in the process of streaming learners to an appropriate level and class grouping following their diagnostic assessments, but in other cases all teachers were not using available information on students well enough. Too many students were not making sufficient progress during sessions.

Teachers in classroom sessions rely too much on the completion of worksheets which do not provide sufficient challenge for more able learners. In a very few sessions, the skills mix of learners was too broad to allow for teachers' effective individual attention or for them to employ a wide range of teaching methods. The range of teaching and learning resources is in the process of being expanded.

In 2014/15, students' achievements in GCSE and functional English and mathematics were very poor and had declined compared to the previous year. This was contrary to managers' expectations that achievements would improve by the end of the year. Far too many students started studying for their qualifications in English and mathematics late and too few actually sat exams for which they were entered. The college has taken effective steps to ensure that learners are starting their qualifications at the beginning of their course and that sessions are timetabled to achieve maximum attendance.

In 2014/15, a very high proportion of learners who had previously achieved a GCSE grade D in English and/or mathematics either did not improve on their grade or achieved a much lower one. Current GCSE grade D students were struggling to understand and apply English language skills at the level required to pass a planned controlled assessment the following week. Learners' homework and classwork in GCSE and functional English and mathematics sessions contained much poor spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The 'JetStream' programme, designed to extend the expertise and skills for employment of learners who had already achieved a grade C or better in English and mathematics, has only been introduced in the past few weeks. Learners on vocational courses commented that their experience of JetStream was that it was not being managed or taught in line with their or managers' expectations, with sessions too noisy and uncoordinated.

Improving the quality and accuracy of self-assessment

reasonable progress

Senior leaders have made good use of a wide range of external and internal evaluations of the college's strengths and weaknesses in order to identify and plan for improvement actions. Analysis, planning and actions are mostly summarised well

in a range of department-level quality improvement plans and course reviews, but a minority were let down by poor quality and poor use of data.

The quality of data collated to inform self-assessment and performance management has only recently become comprehensive and detailed. There are now sufficient senior staff appointed and in post with the necessary experience and expertise of college-wide quality improvement to lead the self-assessment process. A new observation of the teaching and learning process is scheduled to commence later this month, to include formal observations, themed 'learning walks', peer reviews and paired observations.

The full self-assessment process for the academic year 2014/15 is underway; the college recognises that the process should start earlier in future and be aligned to the well-planned new quality improvement cycle.

Training and development are planned to take place imminently in order to ensure that all staff involved in the self-assessment process are able to be sufficiently self-critical and evaluative, meeting the high standard for self-assessment now required.

Improving arrangements for work experience reasonable progress

The proportion of learners who are currently on a placement remains low, but a much higher proportion have placements organised or have started to search for one. Learners now know about and understand the value of external work experience. Those who have completed a placement previously recognise that they have been able to develop their vocational skills and their skills for employment as a result.

Teachers are now tasked with ensuring that all learners who would benefit from a placement organise one. Teachers have spent much time developing links with local employers to increase the opportunities available to learners. Central recording of work experience placements and coordination with the work-based learning team has enabled a greater range of placements to be risk assessed to enable learners to start their placements quickly.

Managers have now stated their expectation that all learners for whom it would be appropriate to do so complete a minimum of 20 hours of work experience as part of their study programme.

Improvement in the collection of destination data to inform curriculum planning reasonable progress

Managers now have destination data available for the 2014/15 academic year. New managers are in post with responsibility for the analysis of the data and subsequent curriculum planning.

Data show that a high proportion of learners who progressed at the college progressed to a higher level of course. However, further analysis and follow-up contact with learners is required to assess the full impact of data. For example, managers do not yet know how many of the learners who applied for places at university have taken them up.

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