

Warrington and Vale Royal College

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Alison Cameron Brandwood,
Her Majesty's Inspector
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Address: Winwick Road
Warrington
Cheshire
WA2 8QA



Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

On 1 August 2017, Warrington Collegiate merged with Mid Cheshire College. At their last full inspections, overall effectiveness at Warrington Collegiate required improvement and at Mid Cheshire College it was inadequate. All judgements were 'requires improvement' at Warrington Collegiate in January 2016. All judgements were 'inadequate' at Mid Cheshire College in May 2017, apart from those for personal development, behaviour and welfare and the provision for apprenticeships. These were judged to require improvement. The themes for this monitoring visit were selected from the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection reports. The progress judgements from this visit will inform Ofsted's risk assessment as to the timing of the next full inspection of the merged college.

Warrington and Vale Royal College is located on three campuses at Warrington, Winsford and Hartford. The majority of learners are based at the Warrington campus. Approximately one fifth of learners are at the Winsford campus. Governors, leaders and managers plan to sell the Hartford campus. They have moved all provision to Warrington and Winsford campuses, except for courses in engineering and electrical installation.

Themes

What progress have senior leaders made in developing an effective quality improvement plan, and in ensuring that appropriate reporting and monitoring arrangements, including rigorous scrutiny by governors, are in place?

Reasonable progress

Leaders, managers and governors have set an ambitious mission and values focused on excellence for learners. One of their two key strategic aims is to become an outstanding provider. Their second priority is to provide stability, while growing in size and reputation. Leaders have developed and implemented a combined college improvement plan incorporating all sites of the newly merged organisation. Leaders and managers accurately identify the areas for improvement. They include key actions to address the weaknesses and detail the progress being made. However, not all actions have resulted in significant improvements. The actions that are most successful are those where leaders and managers had effective strategies in place prior to the merger. These include, for example, safeguarding policies and practice, and learner behaviour.

Leaders and managers update frequently key performance indicators linked to the strategic aims. Governors provide effective scrutiny and challenge to leaders and managers. They have a thorough understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors have a clear focus on learners and improving the quality

of courses at the college. They recognise that improvements in apprenticeships have not been rapid enough. Governors have appropriate skills and abilities. They have recently recruited an experienced senior leader from further education to strengthen the governing board.

Leaders and managers have maintained their focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have prioritised managing underperforming staff during the first year of the merger. Coaching mentors support such staff to help them improve. This often results in improvements to their teaching practice. Leaders and managers act decisively to ensure that staff who fail to improve, following performance management interventions, leave the college.

How successfully do governors, leaders and managers ensure that they secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment across all courses and centres?

Reasonable progress

Governors, leaders and managers prioritise improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have appointed a director of teaching, learning and professional development and two teaching and learning managers to drive improvements in teaching practice. College data for 2017/18 shows that achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and for adult learners have increased and are now high. Leaders have identified accurately the areas and courses where performance is weak and requires greater scrutiny. These include learners aged 16 to 18 who leave level 2 programmes early, apprenticeship provision, accountancy, GCSE mathematics and construction.

Observers accurately identify areas for improvement and focus on learners' progress during observations of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, leaders and managers have introduced a professional development programme that relates to the outcomes from learning walks and observations of teaching and learning to further improve teaching practice.

Leaders and managers have not yet secured improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all courses at every site. In the most effective lessons, teachers successfully plan activities that challenge learners to extend their knowledge and understanding of topics. Learners make good progress in these sessions. For example, in level 3 health and social care, learners learn how to communicate using British Sign Language (BSL) very well. By the end of the lesson they use the BSL alphabet and appropriate signs to communicate effectively a range of clothing and associated colours. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not plan lessons well. They fail to take into consideration learners' prior knowledge, skills or understanding. Teachers' use of questioning and choice of activities do not stimulate learners to make the progress of which they are capable.

Learners' work is appropriate to their level of study. They take pride in their work and produce neat, well-presented and detailed notes. In the majority of instances, teachers provide helpful feedback to learners, which they use to make meaningful improvements to their work.

Leaders' and managers' actions for improvement in mathematics have not had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teaching practice in mathematics is not consistently effective and too few learners make good progress.

How successful are strategies that leaders and managers have put in place to ensure that learners and apprentices make good progress and reach their potential? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have successfully maintained the good progress of learners on level 3 academic qualifications. Leaders and managers have put in place systems and processes by which they monitor the progress of all learners at key points in the academic year, according to their grades in marked assessments. This is still in its initial stages. It has not yet resulted in sufficient outcomes to enable leaders and governors to identify provision where learners make slow progress.

Leaders and managers have put in place changes to the assessment of learners' skills and knowledge at the start of their programme. Teachers and support staff intend to use the information they have gained to support planning of individualised learning and to develop learners' employability and personal skills. This is a new system and it is not yet sufficiently embedded to assess how well learners progress.

Leaders and managers have not applied these new systems for learners to apprentices. Managers and assessors do not set targets for apprentices based on their existing skills, knowledge and behaviours. They focus on the completion of tasks, but not on the acquisition and development of new skills and how apprentices put them into practice in the workplace.

In practical skills lessons, teachers set learners challenging, individualised targets that help learners to make good progress. For example, in hairdressing, teachers set learners who have become skilled at one blow drying technique a different and more difficult technique to learn.

In theory lessons, teachers do not routinely set sufficiently specific targets that help learners to understand how and what they need to do to improve. They too frequently set targets that are the same for each learner. Learners do not benefit from targeted actions by teachers to help them improve their performance and achieve their potential.

Attendance for learners in 2017/18 was below the college target. During the monitoring visit, attendance at the Warrington campus was below the college target. Teachers do not routinely provide effective support or clear guidance for learners who do not attend their lessons. As a result, learners do not receive enough help to enable them to catch up on what they have missed.

What progress have senior leaders made in implementing organisational changes related to the merger and ensuring a positive impact for learners, apprentices and stakeholders?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have managed the recent merger well. They have gained the support of staff and learners for the merged college. Leaders and managers identify what needs to improve and are clear about the progress they have made since the merger. Their actions have had a positive impact on the culture of the organisation. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and most have high expectations of, and aspirations for, their learners. Learners are respectful to each other, staff and visitors. They display positive behaviour in lessons and around the college.

Leaders and managers have taken a measured approach to restructuring the new college. Their strategy to move managers and staff to work at a different campus or across sites has reinforced the positive culture.

Leaders have focused on quality while managing financial savings. During the changes, leaders and managers have reduced staffing costs. They have reduced the costs of the college estate by consolidating most of the provision at Warrington and Winsford campuses. Governors and leaders have a strategic aim to increase enrolments, but they failed to meet their recruitment target for learners aged 16 to 18 in 2017/18 and are still recruiting to meet their 2018/19 target. Governors and leaders continue to focus on this challenging strategic objective and have put in place plans to increase recruitment while keeping costs down. To date, the actions they have taken to reduce expenditure have not adversely affected learners' experience.

Leaders' and managers' actions have not been rapid enough to secure sufficient improvements in the apprenticeship provision. The proportion of apprentices who complete their programme on time remains too low.

Have governors and senior leaders ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective?

Significant progress

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and senior leaders ensure that safeguarding receives the highest priority. Leaders and managers ensure that staff apply safeguarding policies and procedures consistently across all sites and in subcontracted provision. One designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and six deputies have specific responsibilities for safeguarding. Learners feel safe. They have a good understanding of potential risks and know how to keep themselves safe in college and online.

The DSL works closely with the principal and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding to ensure that training for staff and governors and support for learners reflect local needs. A key priority is mental health. For example, the DSL and leaders are working with a local university on a project to build learners' resilience and emotional regulation. The safeguarding team and college staff, including six mental health first aiders, support learners with mental health difficulties very well to remain

on their programme and achieve their goals. Staff and governors receive regular training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Managers resolve safeguarding concerns well through very effective partnerships. They work closely with a range of external agencies including social care, local authority designated officers, police 'Prevent' duty officers and recovery teams. Managers ensure that they protect learners from a range of safeguarding concerns. They take swift action when issues arise.

Leaders and managers ensure that all staff are suitable to work with and support learners. Managers carry out the appropriate checks on staff and governors, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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