

# Cheshire College – South & West

Monitoring visit report of newly merged college

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

On 31 March 2017, South Cheshire College merged with West Cheshire College to form Cheshire College – South & West.

At their previous full inspections, South Cheshire College was good and West Cheshire College required improvement. All key judgements were 'good' at the South Cheshire College in May 2012. In March 2016, a short inspection was carried out at South Cheshire College and their 'good' status was maintained. All key judgements were 'requires improvement' at West Cheshire College. 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.

### 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**

Senior leaders and managers have revised self-assessment processes to ensure that leaders, managers and staff make judgements that are now accurate and consistent across the college. Managers make effective use of a range of data sources to pinpoint areas of underperformance. However, managers have not yet fully addressed all of the areas requiring improvement. While the quality of the engineering and construction courses at Ellesmere Port have improved, courses in sport and health and care, which were identified as requiring improvement in 2016/17, still remain a concern.

Senior leaders have made reasonable progress in ensuring that there are effective quality improvement strategies in place which are beginning to have a beneficial effect on learners. Consequently, the proportion of learners who achieve a high grade has risen, particularly for A-level learners at the Crewe campus. Leaders and managers have sustained and increased the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeship in the planned timescales. The strategy has been less successful for vocational level 3 courses, particularly at the Ellesmere Port campus, where the proportion of learners who achieve a high grade on level 3 sport and health and care courses remains low.

Governance arrangements are effective. Governors work closely with the principal and new senior leadership team to implement a carefully considered strategy for improving all aspects of the college's work. Within the governing body, there is a

good mix of skills and experience in education, finance and business. Governors have a clear vision and are aspirational for the merged college to be outstanding. For example, they set up a 'management and performance committee' whose members closely monitor the impact of actions against the targets set in the college's continuous improvement plan. They use their experience in education skilfully to rigorously monitor performance and to challenge senior leaders where performance is not as good as expected. For example, they recognised that the proportion of learners who achieved a high grade on level 3 courses was too low. In 2017/18, the proportion who achieve a high grade has significantly increased.

**How successfully do governors, leaders and managers ensure that improvements to teaching, learning and assessment are secured and sustained across all courses and centres? In particular, is there effective use of initial and ongoing assessment results, and do teachers provide helpful feedback to help learners improve their work or achieve higher grades?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have revised the lesson observation process and have ensured that all staff undergo observations at least twice annually. All observers have received training and must meet the college's required standard before they observe lessons on their own. Managers moderate observations to ensure that observers are consistent. College observers accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in lessons. Teachers who do not meet the required standards benefit from coaching and individualised staff development to improve their practice. They receive a reobservation within four weeks. Teachers who do not improve quickly enough leave the college. Staff development is comprehensive and includes an hour a week on a key theme which observers identify in their observations and learning walks.

Managers also assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by completing a 'curriculum area review'. This includes the observation of lessons, the scrutiny of learners' work and an assessment of how much progress learners make on their course. Managers use this information well by using a risk-based approach to determine the level of scrutiny, monitoring and support that a subject area needs.

Governors receive regular reports on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which they triangulate with the outcomes that learners achieve. Governors link with subject areas and they complete learning walks with managers. They talk to learners to find out about their experience. This means that governors develop a good understanding of the college.

Managers have developed a more rigorous approach to the assessment of learners' starting points, which staff implement consistently. Staff benefit from training on the new process and, in most cases, learners clearly articulate their starting points and targets. While teachers complete an initial assessment of learners' starting points for vocational subjects and discrete English and mathematics lessons, they do not use

this information consistently well to plan lessons to meet the needs of individual learners. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not set an appropriate level of challenge. This is particularly the case for the most able learners. While teachers provide useful feedback to learners, it does not always help learners to identify specifically what they need to do to improve their work and, consequently, some do not achieve their full potential.

**What progress have leaders made in improving the development of learners' mathematical and English skills, both in specific English and mathematics qualifications, and in vocational courses?**

**Reasonable progress**

Leaders have been successful in ensuring that teachers routinely develop and extend learners' English and mathematics skills well within vocational lessons. Teachers challenge learners in vocational subjects to use correct technical language. For example, in a psychology lesson the teacher ensured that learners understood correctly the term 'recidivism'. Learners are able to use the English skills that they gain to improve their work. For example, level 2 media learners review and edit their work successfully.

Managers have reviewed their strategy for English and mathematics and this ensures that learners enrol on the most appropriate level and type of English and mathematics qualification. They base this on a rigorous assessment of learners' prior attainment. A minority of teachers, however, do not use this assessment to plan individualised learning in these subjects. Managers identify good practice in relation to the structure and assessment on English and mathematics GCSE courses. They share this systematically across the college. It is beginning to address the inconsistencies between the different campuses.

Managers have been less successful in increasing the proportion of learners who achieve a high grade in English and mathematics. However, according to college data for 2017/18, the proportion of learners who make progress towards this goal has increased. In a few instances, the targets and written feedback that teachers provide do not ensure that learners clearly understand what they need to do to improve.

Managers and teachers rigorously monitor attendance. They challenge learners with low attendance and provide support through personal development tutors and by involving parents and carers. Despite these interventions, attendance in English and mathematics classes, particularly at the Ellesmere Port and Chester campuses, remains low.

**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**

The governing body, the principal and his senior team have a clear vision and strategy for the newly merged college. They have quickly taken steps to ensure the stability of the college for learners, staff and stakeholders. The principal has restructured the senior and middle management teams following a rigorous selection process. He, the deputy principal and the senior leaders set high standards and expectations of staff and learners. This means that the finances are now more stable and the quality of the provision has started to improve. For example, the overall achievement rates of the merged college are in line with national rates. The proportion of learners who achieve a qualification at the Crewe campus remains high. The proportion of learners who achieve a vocational qualification at the Ellesmere Port and Chester campuses has increased, particularly in engineering and construction, where they were previously low.

Senior leaders have ensured that the capital investment in resources has significantly improved the learning environments for learners at the Ellesmere Port campus. The effective curriculum strategy means that no courses had to close, and no learners have to travel between sites. Managers have relocated engineering to a new centre at the Ellesmere Port campus, and this meets the needs of local employers better than previously. Managers have developed effective working relationships with local employers, which means that learners benefit from their input into curriculum design and through work experience opportunities.

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

**Significant progress**

Since the merger, senior leaders and managers have reviewed the safeguarding and associated policies. They have ensured that a single policy exists that staff understand and implement. A senior member of staff is the designated senior officer and there are eight staff trained to level 3 to support him.

Staff at all levels have received training to the appropriate level, dependent on their role in the college. Senior managers have invested in an extensive 'be safe' team, which includes learner liaison staff and personal development tutors, as well as designated safeguarding officers. Personal development tutors meet with groups of learners or with individuals on a weekly basis so that they quickly pick up on any emerging concerns. The tutorial agenda is consistent and ensures that in the early weeks of their course, learners learn about health, safety and well-being and know to whom they should go if they have any concerns. Staff also highlight the risks associated with working online. Learners have good access to advice, support and a range of services, including counselling, at each campus. Staff deal quickly with any

concerns that learners disclose, and they keep thorough records. Managers routinely check that staff follow up any concerns to ensure that learners are safe. Managers have effective relationships with local agencies, which they use well to gain advice and support.

Teachers ensure that learners understand and demonstrate safe working practices when in college salons and workshops. Since the last inspection, managers have installed barriers at the campuses at Ellesmere Port and Chester. All learners and staff now wear identification badges, and these campuses are now more secure. Learners rightly say that they feel safe.

All staff undergo an enhanced check before they start work, including volunteers, contractors, external groups and governors. Staff keep an accurate and current record of these checks. Staff check new employees' eligibility to work in the United Kingdom, and ensure that they complete the required safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training.

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