

St Helens College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

On the 12 December 2017, St Helens College (SHC) merged with Knowsley Community College (KCC). At their last inspections, both colleges were judged 'requires improvement' for overall effectiveness. At the last inspection in April 2017, SHC was judged 'inadequate' for apprenticeships and 'requires improvement' for all other key judgements. In KCC's last inspection in March 2016, adult learning and provision for students with high needs were judged 'good' and other key judgements were judged 'requires improvement'. The themes for this monitoring visit are selected from the areas identified for improvement from the last inspections. The progress judgements from this visit will inform Ofsted's risk assessment as to the timing of the next full inspection of the newly merged college.

The college has five campuses, two in St Helens and three in Knowsley. The majority of students are at the St Helens town centre campus and the Knowsley campus in Huyton.

Themes

What progress have senior leaders made in implementing organisational change since the merger to ensure a positive impact for students, apprentices and stakeholders?

Reasonable progress

Since the merger, leaders have restructured the management team to create a single college structure with clear lines of responsibility and accountability for curriculum departments and support services. Governors and the principal are recruiting a deputy principal to complete the senior leadership team. The new single college structure has enabled managers to have a more focused approach to the curriculum offer. They have taken good practice from both colleges to ensure students in St Helens and Knowsley can benefit. For example, a successful vocational foundation programme, to support students who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training, based at the St Helens campus is now also available at the Knowsley campus. Students in Knowsley benefit from the good practice and resources in level 1 land-based courses at St Helens.

Governors and senior leaders have a clear focus on raising expectations. During the merger process, the board of governors ensured that the improvement of the quality of education and training remained a priority. Governors have a good understanding of the areas that require improvement. Governors and leaders closely monitor the comprehensive post-merger action plan. They have aligned all the policies and procedures to support the new structure and to provide clear and consistent guidance to staff and students.

Governors and leaders have supported staff through the merger process with a clear communication strategy. They provide regular updates to staff. Governors, the principal and her team ensure that they are accessible at each campus.

The senior leaders have not yet fully integrated the management and information systems. For example, they still use two websites and two intranets.

What actions have leaders and managers taken to increase attendance and reduce the number of students and apprentices who leave their programmes early and how effective have they been? **Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspections, staff have worked hard to improve attendance across all the campuses. Attendance for students and apprentices at the Knowsley campuses has increased since the last inspection. According to college data, the proportion of students who leave their programmes early reduced across all levels and ages at the Knowsley campuses. In particular, the proportion of 16-to-18-year-olds who remained on level 1 programmes improved considerably at the Knowsley campuses in 2017/18. Attendance for students and apprentices at the St Helens campuses has increased marginally. Although the overall proportion of students who left their programmes early reduced at the St Helens campuses, there was a very slight increase for adults on level 2 programmes and for 16-to-18-year-olds on level 3 programmes. Leaders and managers are right to acknowledge that, despite increasing the proportion of students who progress from year 1 to year 2 on level 3 programmes, this still requires improvement.

Leaders and managers remain focused on increasing attendance and reducing the number of students and apprentices who leave their programme before completion. They have implemented further actions this year. Leaders have recruited two attendance monitoring support staff for curriculum areas in which attendance is poor and another member of staff to support increasing attendance for students in English and mathematics lessons. Managers and tutors monitor students' and apprentices' attendance rigorously. They intervene rapidly when attendance drops below the expected target. During the monitoring visit, attendance in English and mathematics lessons at the Knowsley campus was low.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all campuses? **Reasonable progress**

Since the merger, leaders and managers have used the areas identified from the last inspections and lesson observations to inform a comprehensive and targeted continuous professional development programme for tutors and assessors. Tutors and assessors have benefited from both whole college and individual coaching to improve their practice in areas such as assessment and feedback. When support and

development have not brought about the required improvement, managers have implemented a rigorous performance management process which has resulted in a number of tutors leaving the college.

Managers have reviewed and revised the different lesson observation processes that existed in the two colleges. The approach to the observation of teaching, learning and assessment across all campuses this year is consistent. Observers accurately identify areas for improvement. Students work to good industry standards. For example, level 2 cabin crew students, carrying out evacuation procedures from an aircraft, do so within the time required by the industry. Students and apprentices take pride in their work and present it well. Tutors and assessors give students and apprentices useful and detailed feedback which they use to improve the quality of their work.

However, in a minority of lessons, the pace of learning is slow and tutors do not routinely check learning. In a few lessons, tutors do not plan learning effectively to meet the needs of all their students. As a result, students make slow progress.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that students and apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills and achieve their qualifications? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers place a high priority on improving students' and apprentices' English and mathematics skills. They encourage students and apprentices to participate in a range of activities, including the national mathematics challenge initiative and creative writing competitions. Leaders and managers have established an English and mathematics specialist teaching team. They have successfully shared good practice to bring about improvements. For example, tutors at the St Helens campus shared their good practice in marking with tutors at the Knowsley campus. Consequently, the proportion of students at the Knowsley campus who gained GCSE English high grades increased significantly in 2017/18.

In English lessons, tutors plan learning that challenges students and apprentices. They use students' prior knowledge to set targets in the lesson. Students and apprentices make good progress in their lessons. Students and apprentices develop good use of technical terminology relating to their vocational subject. For example, in science, students confidently use terms such as aorta and ventricle when describing blood pressure. However, in vocational lessons tutors do not routinely check for, or challenge, the spelling errors that students and apprentices make.

Leaders and managers have recently put in place strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics. Tutors have received training to level 7 in mathematics. More recently, managers have introduced a homework learning platform to improve students' progress in developing their mathematical skills. It is too soon to measure the impact of these actions.

In mathematics lessons, tutors do not use students' prior knowledge to set appropriate targets to help students make good progress. Leaders and managers are

right to acknowledge that although students' progress in achieving their English and mathematics qualifications improved in 2017/18, this remains an area for improvement.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that assessors accurately identify apprentices' starting points and plan programmes to meet their needs and support them to achieve their potential? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have reviewed and restructured the apprenticeship provision. Apprentices now study English, mathematics and information and communication technology from the start of their programme. According to college data for 2017/18, this has had a positive impact. Most apprentices completed and achieved their functional skills qualifications within their planned end date. Leaders have removed all subcontracting arrangements for apprenticeship provision. However, historic underperformance of subcontracting partners has a negative impact on the Knowsley campus data for 2017/18.

Leaders and managers have introduced a more robust information, advice and guidance process for the recruitment of apprentices. Assessors have a detailed skills scan to assess and identify apprentices' starting points in their knowledge, skills and behaviours. However, they do not always use this well to plan learning across all the apprenticeship programmes.

Leaders and managers rigorously monitor apprentices' progress. They have introduced an electronic monitoring system so that they can monitor more closely the progress that apprentices make.

The overall proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications at the St Helens campuses has improved to above the national rates.

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