

Hertford Regional College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Hertford Regional College was inspected in March 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in rectifying the four main areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

The college provides a broad range of post-16 education and training, predominantly located on its two main campuses in Broxbourne and Ware. The college has enrolled around 1,900 learners aged 16 to 19 years on study programmes, 900 adult learners, 600 apprentices and 80 learners in receipt of high-needs funding. Most learners reside in Broxbourne, East Hertfordshire, the London Borough of Enfield, Harlow and Epping Forest.

The proportion of learners in Hertfordshire who achieve at least five GCSE passes at grades 9 to 4 is above the national average. However, this varies considerably across the county, with schools in the south performing less well than those in east Hertfordshire.

Themes

Continue to improve teaching, learning and assessment on study programmes provision so learners make good progress from their starting points

Reasonable progress

Teaching is strengthening. Leaders' and managers' efforts to ensure that teachers receive good training, support and development to improve their teaching are reaping dividends. However, some teaching is not effective and fails to enable learners to make swift progress.

Where teaching is effective, teachers provide set tasks, both in and out of lessons, that successfully challenge their learners to make good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. They make sure that learners work hard on a broad range of interesting and challenging activities that help them grasp relevant theory and understand how it applies to their practical work and the commercial demands of relevant industry. For example, beauty therapy teachers ensure that learners have a sound knowledge of anatomy and physiology and apply this understanding to inform how they conduct successful treatments on clients and meet industry standards. Teachers provide stimulating activities for learners studying music and production courses that enable them to effectively relate underpinning theory to their musicianship and their technical knowledge of recording and production. Teachers deploy incisive questioning techniques that enable learners to distil and interpret meanings and extend their higher-level thinking skills. For example, in an English

GCSE lesson a teacher skilfully used a succession of probing questions across the classroom to enable learners studying the text, 'Brighton Rock', to comprehend the author's use of language features, dialogue and context and apply this understanding more confidently to a practice written assessment. Teachers provide activities that meet the abilities of all their learners and enable them to make rapid progress. For example, a teacher of a mathematics GCSE course provided a broad range of tasks that were accurately pitched to the different needs of learners and that challenged them to successfully solve algebraic problems of varying complexity. The teacher provided very helpful, patient and enthusiastic coaching to ensure that learners practised, repeated and mastered mathematical sequences to arrive at correct answers. Teachers provide precise oral and regular written feedback on learners' work that helps learners understand what they need to do to improve.

Where teaching is not good enough, teachers do not provide a clear structure and relevant activities in lessons to motivate and challenge learners to work diligently and improve their knowledge and skills. As a result, some learners become bored and engage in conversations that distract the learning of others. Teaching is sometimes too pedestrian and pitched to the lowest ability level of the class, leaving the more-able learners with little to do. These teachers have low expectations of their learners and too often refrain from setting demanding tasks that will challenge their learners to think more deeply, develop their analytical skills and make rapid progress from their starting points. When teachers do not explain theory well, they move on to other aspects of learning without checking learners have fully understood. For example, where teachers do attempt to check learners' understanding, they do not use specific questioning or provide clear recaps to consolidate and extend learners' understanding and application.

Teachers challenge learners to excel by accurately assessing prior achievement, setting appropriate targets and monitoring learners' progress to achieving high standards of work

Reasonable progress

Teachers are making better use of the comprehensive assessment information they receive to set, monitor and review challenging targets with their learners. They have increasingly high expectations, and task learners to work diligently and produce practical and theory work to a high standard. Consequently, most learners can clearly articulate their targets and goals and illustrate how they will achieve them and make good progress. This is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. However, some teachers do not set targets that challenge their learners to improve their knowledge, skills and behaviours. These teachers focus solely on learners achieving qualification units to the detriment of learners deepening their knowledge, extending their skills, making swift progress and reaching their potential. These teachers often do not conduct the planned reviews they have agreed with their learners. As a result, learners do not know what progress they are making, how to make rapid progress and are not challenged to improve the standards of their work.

Leaders and managers ensure that most teachers record and monitor learners' progress on the cross-college electronic tracking system. However, some teachers do not. In addition, while these teachers hold such information at course level, a few managers do not collect, sufficiently analyse and report it. Consequently, leaders are not able to accurately understand whether a greater proportion of learners are making better progress than previously or put in place appropriate, incisive actions to ensure that those at risk of falling behind in their studies can catch up and make rapid progress.

Learners regularly attend their lessons, particularly on English and mathematics courses

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have further demonstrated their intent to improve learners' attendance by recruiting two new 'attendance and employability coordinator' posts. These posts focus on ensuring that learners regularly attend their lessons and work experience placements. Leaders have also strengthened the processes for reporting absences and for planning to ensure that staff follow up on learners' absences more quickly than before. As a result, most learners attend their lessons regularly and clearly understand how good attendance improves the likelihood of their making swift progress. The overall level of attendance across the college is slightly below leaders' challenging target.

Notwithstanding this improvement, some learners do not regularly attend their lessons. Too many learners are not punctual at the start of lessons and their late arrivals disrupt the learning of others. Attendance on English and mathematics courses has increased since the previous inspection but is not high, and some learners continue to miss too many lessons.

Learners enrolled on study programmes complete high-quality, well-timed work experience that helps them to consolidate their learning and understand their next steps

Significant progress

Leaders and managers now ensure that purposeful, substantial work experience is available for all learners on study programmes who are ready to take up such experience. Almost all work placements take place in industries relevant to learners' studies. Around a fifth of learners had taken part in high-quality work placements at the time of this monitoring visit. Clear plans are in place for the remainder to take up such experience earlier in the academic year than previously. This will enable learners to apply their experiences to their studies and bolster their understanding of the industry-specific knowledge and skills they need to pursue their career aspirations.

Leaders have appointed four new work placement coordinator posts to help support managers and teachers ensure that learners benefit from meaningful work placements and maximise their learning. Staff now promote intently the importance

of work experience through the revised induction process that all learners receive at the start of their learning. The revised tutorial programme includes a specific, mandatory focus on the value of work placements, work-related learning and the steps learners need to take to achieve their career ambitions.

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