

Highbury College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Highbury College was inspected in April 2018. Inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement. All key judgements, 16 to 19 study programmes and apprenticeships were judged to require improvement. Adult learning programmes and provision for students with high needs were judged to be good.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in dealing with the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Highbury College is a medium-sized general further education college serving the city of Portsmouth and the surrounding areas of East Hampshire, Fareham, Gosport and Havant.

Portsmouth is one of the most densely populated cities in the country. It has the fourth largest economy in the South East, with a broad employment base, and is the national home of the Royal Navy. The city has several areas of high deprivation.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in evaluating the quality and impact of teaching on students' progress and the standards of their work?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have reviewed the methods they use to evaluate the quality and impact of teaching and learning. They recognised that they were using a narrow range of evidence and that their judgements were unreliable and overoptimistic.

Staff who observe lessons now consider, as a priority, what students can do as a result of being in the lesson, rather than the actions that teachers are taking. The actions that observers set for teachers to improve are relevant and specific to improving students' progress. They also identify accurately what teachers are doing to a high standard and the impact this is having on students' learning.

Subject managers now review samples of students' work to evaluate its standard, the progress students are making, the accuracy of assessment and the quality of teachers' feedback. They use this information thoughtfully as part of their evidence to evaluate the quality and impact of teaching and to identify the training that teachers need. This evidence forms part of new performance management and appraisal processes.

Managers recognise that they still have work to do to get all teachers working to the same high standard, but they now know the priorities for improvement for individual teachers, for subject areas and for the college. They have implemented a range of highly relevant training for teachers but recognise that the full impact of the training has yet to show itself in all subjects and lessons. Teachers have taken part in training with enthusiasm and they have helped plan further training later in the academic year.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving rapidly students' attendance at lessons? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers work effectively to improve students' attendance at lessons. Students' attendance has improved modestly in the current academic year. Teachers place much emphasis on the importance of students' attendance at lessons, both for learning and as an important behaviour that employers value. Students are aware of how important it is to attend, and they know the actions teachers take if they are absent.

Teachers record students' absences accurately and almost all know why any students are absent. Most students are diligent in reporting their absence and the reason for this to teachers. Teachers are becoming better at developing teaching resources that absent students can use online to keep up-to-date with their learning.

Mentors are allocated to those students at risk of not achieving their qualifications because of poor attendance. They provide students with help and guidance to overcome their barriers to attending lessons. Students, parents and carers receive text messages and phone calls with reminders and notifications of absence. In cases of persistent student absence, college staff work with staff from the local council to visit students and their parents and carers at home to develop support plans. Where appropriate, college staff provide money from hardship funds to help with travel and the purchase of materials. This frequently enables these students to start attending college again.

Despite their decisive actions, students' attendance at English and mathematics lessons remains about 12% below that for vocational lessons. Vocational teachers and teachers of English and mathematics are working together to support students' attendance. For example, vocational teachers attend English and mathematics lessons with their students. Curriculum managers have changed course timetables to place these lessons in the middle of the teaching day to limit the opportunities for students to be absent.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring teachers and assessors help students develop and apply their skills in English and mathematics?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have given a high priority to improving students' English and mathematics skills. As a result, teachers are becoming more adept at helping students improve these skills. Teachers emphasise frequently to students why these skills are important in the workplace. For example, level 2 and 3 catering students calculated the percentage profit on the dishes they were preparing and were able to scale up the ingredients needed for recipes to make larger quantities. Level 3 engineering students applied formulae relating to the energy efficiency of refrigeration and air conditioning systems confidently and accurately.

Leaders and managers provide relevant training opportunities for teachers to improve their own English and mathematics skills. Teachers are enthusiastic about these opportunities and many now sign up for training sessions, rather than being directed to them by their managers. They are more effective in helping their students develop relevant skills as a result.

In a few instances, students at levels 1 and 2 are less confident in using technical and vocational language at the level of proficiency expected at this stage of their course. Several teachers occasionally do not model good written or spoken English skills.

Teachers do not yet help students, particularly those at level 3, to develop their skills in analysis and evaluation to prepare them well for study at higher levels.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that teachers and assessors plan and teach lessons using the information they have about students' and apprentices' prior learning and potential, so that they excel?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have put in place a very wide range of training to help teachers and assessors improve their professional practice. Leaders and managers have used evidence from lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of students' and apprentices' work to implement training that is highly relevant to the areas for improvement identified. Most teachers have embraced these opportunities enthusiastically and improved their teaching as a result.

The most skilled teachers and assessors plan and teach lessons that take into account the progress made by students or apprentices in the previous lesson and what they need to achieve in the current lesson. They agree specific development targets with students and apprentices at the start of each lesson. They frequently monitor progress towards these targets, giving students and apprentices supportive

and developmental feedback during the lesson. For example, hairdressing students agree specific skills development targets at the start of each practical session in the salon, which they review at key stages of the session.

As a result of the training they have received, teachers and assessors have improved the quality and impact of the feedback they give to students and apprentices. In the best examples, teachers and assessors identify accurately what students or apprentices have done well and what precisely they need to do to improve and fulfil their potential. Students value the feedback they receive from teachers and can identify subsequent improvements to their work.

A small minority of teachers do not yet have sufficiently high expectations of what their students can achieve in lessons. They do not check students' learning effectively and cannot therefore plan further learning accurately. As a result, students do not make rapid and sustained progress with their learning.

In a few cases, teachers and assessors express the learning intended for the lesson or training session as an activity, rather than saying clearly to students or apprentices what new skills, knowledge or behaviours they will learn. In such cases students and apprentices are not certain what they are meant to learn and what progress they should make.

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