

Easton and Otley College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 138670

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Inspection date(s): 27 to 28 March 2019

Type of provider: Specialist further education college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to Easton and Otley College following publication of the inspection report on 12 November 2018, which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, outcomes for learners, 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes. The provider's effectiveness of leadership and management was judged as requiring improvement. The apprenticeship provision and provision for learners who have high needs were judged to be good.

Most of the governors and senior leaders remain unchanged since the inspection. Two new governors have recently been recruited who have educational expertise. An interim deputy principal has been appointed to support leaders and managers to raise standards.

Themes

What actions have leaders and managers taken to ensure that students on study programmes and adult learning programmes complete their courses and achieve their qualifications?

Leaders and managers have a good awareness of which courses underperformed in 2017/18, and they have carefully evaluated the causes for this. They have implemented suitable improvement actions and these are beginning to have an impact. For example, achievement rates were very low on the level 3 diploma in animal management and on the level 1 award in fitness and physical activity. Managers' actions to modify the curriculum for these courses have resulted in a higher proportion of learners being on track to achieve in the current year.

Teachers use an online tool to track learners' progress towards achieving their qualifications, but they do not use this consistently across the different curriculum areas. As a result, senior leaders and governors do not have a complete picture of the progress current learners are making. Equally, learners do not have a good enough awareness of where they are on their course, or of the progress they are making.

Governors receive incomplete information about the progress that learners make. They also do not receive data on the in-year retention of learners. As a result, governors do not have a clear picture of whether improvements have been made.

Difficulties in staff recruitment and retention are having a negative impact on learners' experiences. In too many subjects, leaders and managers have been unable to secure permanent teachers and are dependent on agency staff, for example in

construction, engineering and agriculture. This has resulted in a lack of continuity in learning.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that staff report learners' progress accurately so that they, managers, leaders and governors have a clear picture of where achievement rates will be high, and where they will be low.
- Make sure that learners know what progress they are making in achieving their qualifications, and that they understand the knowledge and skills they need to develop to bridge any gaps in their learning.
- Ensure governors, particularly the curriculum and quality committee, receive accurate information about retention on programmes and learners' likely achievements.

How effective have leaders and managers been in ensuring that students make at least good progress from their starting points?

Managers have placed greater accountability on middle managers for the success of students and this is beginning to allow them to manage performance in their areas of responsibility. Staff development has been focused appropriately on improving teaching and learning to enable learners to make better progress. Staff have an appropriate tool for recording the progress that learners make relative to their prior educational attainment. They ensure that all learners have target grades for qualifications where grades beyond a pass are available.

Leaders and managers have more work to do to ensure that these measures have a positive impact on learners' progress. While staff have high expectations of what learners can achieve in their practical work, this is not the case in classroom-based learning. Teachers too often do not expect learners to go beyond a basic level of knowledge or skill. Teachers do not use assessment well enough to check the knowledge and skills that learners gain. They do not review regularly enough with learners what progress they are making in achieving their target grades. Too often, the targets teachers set do not specify precisely enough the knowledge or skills that learners need to develop. As a result, learners do not have a good enough idea or clear understanding of the progress they make, and too many do not work at a high enough level.

Priorities for improvement

- Teachers should make sure that students are aware of their target grades, and that they know what progress they are making in achieving them.
- Teachers should assess and review more regularly with learners the progress they make towards achieving their targets.
- Managers should review the quality of targets set to ensure that these are consistently useful to learners across all curriculum areas.

- In classroom-based lessons, teachers should use more effective strategies to check what learners have learned and move them beyond a basic understanding of the topics taught.

What actions have governors, leaders and managers taken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on study programmes and on adult learning programmes? How effective have these actions been in improving the quality of learners' experiences?

Governors and senior leaders have committed resources appropriately to improve the quality of teaching and learning by introducing advanced teaching and learning coaches. Coaches are suitably trained and experienced and have been allocated a considerable amount of time to support colleagues. In particular, they focus on helping new or underperforming staff to develop their teaching skills. However, the impact of their work is not yet evident.

Many of the curriculum managers are new to this level of management. Senior leaders correctly recognise that their confidence and skill in their roles are variable, and that for them to be consistently effective, they need further professional development. They have implemented suitable strategies to do this, including providing them with individual coaching to work on carefully targeted areas of development.

While managers have a suitable set of quality and assurance processes, they do not use these effectively. They are unclear about who has accountability or is responsible for improving teaching, learning and assessment. They do not fully understand their part in the lines of communication, performance management and oversight. As a result, managers are behind schedule in completing observations of teaching and learning. Staff who have previously performed poorly, or who are on probation, have not had follow-up observations. Managers are insufficiently aware of the competencies of these staff in their roles.

Although student surveys are completed, managers do not use the information from these well enough to monitor progress in improvements to the quality of teaching. Managers do not have a secure view of what learners think about their courses, and do not use learners' views well enough to set actions for improvement.

Governors do not receive precise enough information, both at whole corporation and curriculum and quality committee levels, about key aspects of the college's performance. The curriculum and standards committee has started to receive more detailed reports from curriculum managers, but, at the most recent meeting, these still contained gaps in information. As a result, the committee is unable to have a complete picture of the quality of teaching and learning, and of learners' experiences.

Teaching and learning coaches have created a useful set of 'teaching takeaway' sessions, which have been made available to all staff. However, not all staff have

had access to these materials and are therefore not able to benefit from this initiative.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that middle managers and teaching and learning coaches are clear about their respective responsibilities and accountabilities for improving the quality of teaching.
- Ensure that observations of staff are completed in a timely way, especially for staff on probation and those whose performance is weak.
- Use the views of learners to evaluate their experiences at the college to better improve the quality of learning.
- Ensure that more staff take up opportunities to develop their skills.
- Support curriculum managers further to gain the skills they need to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

How effective have leaders and managers been in improving the attendance of students on study programmes and adult learning programmes?

Leaders and managers have taken suitable action to improve learners' attendance. They have delegated responsibility to curriculum managers, who ensure that the actions taken to improve attendance address the particular problems in their areas. Managers' data for learners' attendance in the current year shows an improvement over the previous year. Inspectors found that, in most classes visited, attendance was good. While attendance in English and mathematics lessons has improved, it is not yet good.

Priorities for improvement

- Maintain a sharp focus on improving attendance, in particular in English and mathematics lessons and in those subjects where managers have identified it is not good enough.

How effective have managers been in ensuring that students make good or better progress in developing their skills in English and mathematics and in ensuring that they improve the proportion of students who gain high grades in these subjects?

Governors and senior leaders are fully aware of the challenges they face in raising standards of teaching and learners' outcomes in English and mathematics. They have employed a consultant to oversee the development of these subjects and have appointed a teaching and learning coach to provide support to teachers and to lead on staff training. The actions taken to date have focused appropriately on general teaching strategies, but lack input on teaching specific subjects. The impact of coaching on teaching and learning is not yet evident.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been adversely affected by the difficulties that leaders and managers have in recruiting suitably trained and skilled staff. At the start of the year, staffing and timetabling problems resulted in too much disruption to teaching and learning. While managers have resolved most timetabling issues, the challenge of finding permanent staff persists. The disruption at the start of the year resulted in learners perceiving English and mathematics as being less important than other aspects of their study programme. This has had a consequently negative effect on their motivation and attendance.

Staff do not use their assessment of learners' prior skills and knowledge well enough to place learners on a course that leads to the most suitable qualification. In particular, inspectors found examples of learners enrolled on GCSE courses for which they did not have the correct prior qualifications.

Teachers are not skilled enough at planning work and teaching lessons that provide sufficient challenge to learners. They do not use their assessments and mock examinations effectively in order to help learners improve or to prepare for public examinations. Learners do not receive feedback that helps them to understand what they need to do to bridge gaps in their knowledge or skills. They are not adequately aware of the grades they are likely to achieve and do not fully understand the requirements of the examinations.

Managers recognise that they have work to do to raise achievement rates with current learners. They have put in place suitable arrangements to provide learners with extra support, for example catch-up sessions between now and the examinations.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that learners are fully aware, from the time they apply for a course, of the importance of learning English and mathematics in their study programmes.
- At the start of the next academic year, prioritise the staffing and timetabling of English and mathematics courses to avoid disruptions to learning.
- Coaches should develop their support for staff so that it is more subject specific and helps teachers to improve the strategies they use to teach particular English and mathematics topics.
- Staff should assess accurately learners' prior skills, knowledge and qualification achievements in English and mathematics. They should use this information to ensure that learners are placed on the correct courses.
- Lecturers should assess more accurately the skills and knowledge learners develop during the year so that they can help individual learners bridge any gaps in their learning.

- Lecturers should provide learners with precise information about the requirements of their examinations so that learners are fully aware what they need to do to pass their qualifications.

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