

Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

In December 2017, Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education, a large general further education college in Norwich, merged with Paston Sixth Form College in North Walsham. The most recent inspection reports for both colleges found them to be 'good'. Each part of the college has maintained its own identity. The Norwich campus continues to be known informally as City College Norwich (CCN) and Paston Sixth Form College is known simply as Paston College.

The purpose of this monitoring visit was to investigate the progress leaders and managers have made in establishing shared systems, and in maintaining or improving the previously high standard of education on offer.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were just over 7,500 learners of all ages following classroom-based and apprenticeship programmes in a wide range of subjects.

Themes

What progress have leaders, managers and governors made in establishing a shared vision, mission and values, and in creating a culture of high expectations?

Significant progress

Following the decision to merge, the principal and senior leaders of CCN established a clear communication strategy. They kept staff informed about events in the run up to the merger. Since the completion of the merger, they have continued to ensure that everyone at the college is clear about the expectations and values of the new organisation. The merger has resulted in more substantial changes for staff formerly employed by Paston Sixth Form College than for those formerly at CCN. The clarity of communication has meant that changes have been well received by staff and learners of Paston College.

Leaders have established a distinctive vision and set of values that are enshrined in its seven 'Ways of Working' (WoW) and shared with staff and learners. WoW has helped governors, staff and learners across the whole organisation to be clear about the expectations that they should have of one another. All those who work and study at the college are clear that WoW represents a set of guiding principles, rather than a rigid code. They apply these principles to their own work in ways they feel are most appropriate. For example, the 'aspirational and entrepreneurial values' are evident in programmes to support higher achieving learners at Paston College to prepare for moving into highly selective universities. At CCN, staff have worked closely with the local enterprise partnership (LEP) to secure funds to build a new Digital Technology Centre. Staff have developed a close relationship with the Royal Academy of Engineers, which provides visiting speakers to help attract females into the engineering sector.

Managers have organised joint training days for all staff of the merged college. This has helped staff, especially those formerly of Paston Sixth Form College, to feel part of a single organisation. Prior to the merger, several staff members at Paston Sixth Form College were the only teachers of their subject and the merger has provided them with access to a network of fellow subject specialists.

What progress have leaders made in maintaining and developing a curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of the communities it serves, and to what extent has this curriculum been effectively implemented by managers and teachers? **Significant progress**

Leaders and managers have continued to work well with a wide range of local stakeholders to ensure that they offer programmes that are aligned to local and regional skills needs. Since the merger, this has resulted in some important changes to the range of programmes on offer at Paston College. Managers have carefully and gradually introduced programmes at level 1 and 2, and they plan to introduce more vocational programmes, apprenticeships and a small number of programmes for learners who have high needs. These changes have been well received by staff and local partners.

College staff continue to work very well with local employers, who are consequently enthusiastic about their relationships with the college. They speak positively about the responsiveness shown by college staff when specific training needs are identified. For example, the college responded quickly to requests from an employer to introduce the 'cooker' element of a gas engineering programme to better meet their needs. Several employers have received regional and national awards for their apprenticeship programmes, and all those spoken with during the inspection were clear that their success has been in large part due to the work of college staff.

Managers have developed specialist facilities in response to the needs of local employers. For example, they have worked with a local business to develop gas workshops and have secured a £6 million contribution from the LEP towards the £9 million cost of the new Digital Technology Centre. Collaboration with a local heritage project has enabled construction learners to gain valuable experience working with historic windmills and pumps on the Norfolk Broads. This has significantly boosted their expertise in a highly specialised area of construction.

The merger has allowed managers to strengthen academic programmes. They have been able to continue offering A-level programmes in minority subjects by working across the two sites. For example, further mathematics provision has been maintained by combining classes.

What progress have leaders made in combining the good quality assurance arrangements of the precursor colleges into a coherent and effective model for the merged college, and to what extent has this ensured that the previous good **Significant progress**

standards of teaching, learning and assessment have been maintained?

College managers have continued to follow the quality improvement processes that operated within the former CCN. These are well-established processes that continue to serve the merged college well.

The college has a very positive culture of continuous improvement. Senior leaders allow managers and staff a significant degree of autonomy when deciding what processes to use to improve the quality of provision in their own subject areas. This relies on managers and staff being highly competent and acting with integrity to bring about improvements for learners. The trust that senior leaders place in staff is repaid by the enthusiasm and effort shown by teachers and managers at all levels to improve the quality of programmes.

Processes for monitoring the quality of provision include different tools, or Quality Review Opportunities (QROs) as they are known in the college. These include lesson observations, short, themed observations of groups of lessons to identify common areas for improvement, learner focus groups, and audits of learner work and individual learning plans. The products of these QROs feed into regular half-termly review meetings that lead to improvement actions. However, although managers can describe the actions they take to tackle areas of weakness, and these are mostly effective, they do not keep clear records of this activity or evaluate its impact sufficiently.

Because of quality improvement processes, teaching, learning and assessment continue to be highly effective. The lessons observed during the visit were of a uniformly good standard. Learners produce work of an appropriate standard and most teachers mark it thoroughly, providing clear and specific feedback to help learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.

What progress have managers and staff made in ensuring that all learners and apprentices are helped to develop their knowledge and understanding of living and working in modern Britain? Reasonable progress

All learners spoken to during the inspection find the college to be an inclusive and supportive place to study. Several described how the college had helped them to overcome a range of challenges arising from their individual differences, and all felt that staff and fellow learners treated them with respect. Learners report that staff model college values appropriately. Teachers work positively to explore and discuss the thoughts of learners whose views do not align well with college values.

Managers and staff have endeavoured to develop a curriculum that supports learners and apprentices to understand a range of themes related to life in modern Britain, including safeguarding, equality, diversity, inclusion and British values.

Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes benefit from a tutorial programme that introduces these themes. Most learners can recall having studied a wide range of topics, but few can recall anything but the basic details of these topics. In a few

cases, tutorial schemes contain too little focus on these important subjects. A few academic and vocational teachers include elements of these topics in their lessons, where appropriate. However, many learners do not have enough opportunities to learn in more detail about subjects such as the workings of democracy. Where these topics are integral to learners' qualifications, such as those in public services, learners demonstrate a clear and detailed understanding of a wide range of relevant themes.

Apprentices examine these topics in their progress review meetings and adult learners have some exposure to them through academic and vocational lessons. However, as with younger learners, these learners struggle to recall more than basic information on these subjects.

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