

Lancaster and Morecambe College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Lancaster and Morecambe 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 addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Themes

How successful have leaders, managers, tutors and trainers been in increasing the proportion of learners and apprentices who make at least the progress expected of them? Reasonable progress

Leaders, managers and staff have worked tirelessly, since the previous inspection, to ensure that a higher proportion of learners and apprentices make at least the progress expected of them on their courses and programmes. Their hard work is beginning to have a demonstrable impact on learners' experiences at college and for apprentices in the workplace. Learners cite the increased amount of support that they receive; the challenging work briefs allow them to extend their knowledge and skills beyond the qualifications that they study.

Tutors and trainers now ensure that a range of assessments are completed at the start of the course to identify learners' and apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and experiences, such as employment-related skills and technical, English and mathematical skills.

Most teachers and trainers use this extensive information to plan a curriculum that challenges learners and apprentices to develop substantial new knowledge and skills at college and in the workplace. However, a small minority of teachers of English and mathematics on 16 to 19 study programmes do not fully utilise information on learners' starting points to ensure that learners make consistently strong progress and develop the knowledge and skills they need to reach their potential in these subjects.

College managers hold half-termly assessment board meetings to ensure that learners and apprentices make the progress which is expected of them. Where learners and apprentices do not make progress as expected, managers ensure that swift action is taken to help them to catch up. As a result, the vast majority of learners and apprentices make the expected progress in their studies.

How effective are the progress monitoring systems that leaders and managers implemented and how well are they used by staff? Do senior managers and governors have an accurate oversight of the progress that learners and apprentices make on their courses?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and governors now have a more comprehensive oversight of the progress that learners and most apprentices make on their courses. They challenge senior managers to improve the provision. However, leaders and governors need to ensure that they have this oversight for all provision types, including apprenticeships, so that all learners and apprentices make at least the expected progress in their studies and achieve their potential.

Leaders and managers have been successful in designing and implementing a progress monitoring system that allows staff to identify how well college-based learners are progressing on their courses. Staff use this system effectively to support their planning of learning. Tutors and managers quickly and accurately identify, in assessment board meetings, those learners who need support to improve their grades further. Leaders have recruited pastoral tutors who provide rapid and effective support for learners and apprentices who fall behind, or who are not achieving their potential, and support them to catch up.

Leaders and managers have not yet achieved the same consistent level of oversight of the progress made by all apprentices on their courses as they have for college-based learners. They have an accurate record of skills progress for just over two thirds of apprentices on construction programmes and hairdressing who attend college. However, they do not have this information for the remaining apprentices who complete their off-the-job training at their place of work. As a result, managers are constrained in their ability to support apprentices who require additional support.

Leaders and governors rightly acknowledge that they do not yet have an accurate oversight of the skills progress that all apprentices make on their courses. They have plans in place to ensure that all leaders, managers and governors will have an oversight of all apprentices' progress by September 2019.

How effective are senior managers' strategies to improve the proportion of learners and apprentices who attend college?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers monitor the attendance of learners and apprentices through weekly and monthly summary attendance reports. They highlight attendance throughout the college in the form of a red, amber and green colour chart. This essentially identifies attendance of different learners or groups of learners in relation to college targets. Leaders and managers take decisive actions when learners and apprentices do not meet the expected standards for attendance.

Leaders and managers are making reasonable progress in ensuring that a higher proportion of learners attend college. In 2017/18, overall attendance at lessons was slightly below the college target of 88%. In the current year, attendance has

improved, and is now slightly above this target. However, for learners studying on 16 to 19 study programmes, attendance at English and mathematics lessons has been stubbornly low for the previous three years. Senior leaders have identified this as an area for further improvement.

Apprenticeship attendance is high and significantly above the college target. Leaders and managers have been successful in improving the proportion of apprentices who attend the college since the previous inspection.

Leaders and managers have rightly acknowledged that the current policies and procedures to monitor and evaluate the attendance of learners and apprentices need further development. They are currently reviewing these documents to ensure that there is clarity on reporting expectations, arrangements to request exceptional term-time leave, and following up unauthorised and/or unreported absences by learners and apprentices.

How effective have senior managers, teachers and trainers been in improving learners' and apprentices' English and mathematical knowledge and skills throughout their time at college?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers collaborate with several outstanding colleges in the region to improve the quality of experience and standard of learning that learners and apprentices receive. They are also working with a local college through the strategic college improvement fund to develop teachers' practice further, for example through exchange visits and the sharing of resources. It is too early to see any impact of these partnerships on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the college.

Leaders and managers have been successful in improving the proportion of learners who make progress from their starting points on the 16 to 19 study programmes. Data indicates that learners who studied English in 2017/18 made better progress compared to their peers nationally. However, while the proportion of learners who make the expected progress on mathematics courses has improved, progress from starting points is below that in similar colleges nationally. The proportion of learners who stay on their course is high and significantly above that in similar colleges nationally.

Leaders and managers have prioritised the integration of English and mathematics skills into vocational and academic lessons. Inspectors observed effective development of new mathematical skills in lessons. For example, level 1 joinery learners were set challenging tasks to enhance their existing carpentry skills and learned new geometrical equations when constructing a gable end roof structure. Teachers' effective checking of these learners' written work has resulted in significant improvements throughout their course.

To what extent have senior managers been successful in improving the operational management of the apprenticeship provision since the previous inspection?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have worked hard to improve the operational management of apprenticeships. In July 2018, following a restructure at the college, a new dedicated apprenticeship management team was implemented. The director of apprenticeships, supported by a dedicated apprenticeship manager, now has oversight of apprenticeship provision. All members of staff, following consultation, have now had their job roles aligned to reflect the new skills that they will need to provide high-quality training to apprentices.

Trainers now use the information gathered from initial assessments of apprentices' skills effectively to plan challenging learning which enthuses and motivates apprentices to develop substantial new knowledge and skills. This planning has resulted in apprentices developing new competencies that apprentices value and that make a positive contribution to their employers' businesses. For example, customer service apprentices acquire new knowledge of loyalty rewards and the importance of these schemes in the retail sector.

Trainers receive targeted continuous professional development to develop their teaching and mentoring practice. As a result, both apprentices and employers identify the significant changes that the college has made in improving apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours since the previous inspection.

Managers have recently introduced a skills development academy to support apprentices' learning. These half-day sessions provide apprentices with the knowledge to help them develop the behaviours that they need to be successful in their apprenticeships and at their places of work. The sessions help apprentices develop their skills in influencing and negotiating, customer service, dealing with conflict and effective communication skills.

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