

Easton and Otley College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Rieks Drijver, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Specialist further education college

Address: Easton Campus
Easton
Norwich
Norfolk
NR9 5DX



Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection 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 with high needs were judged to be good.

Since the first re-inspection monitoring visit in March 2019, a decision has been taken to de-merge the two campuses at Easton and Otley. Plans are in place for Easton College to merge with New City College Norwich, and for Otley College to merge with Suffolk New College. These mergers are planned to be completed in early January 2020.

Themes

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

By the time of the previous inspection, a high proportion of learners had already withdrawn from their studies, and this position was no longer recoverable in the second half of the academic year. Governors, leaders, managers and staff rightly focused their attention on ensuring that as many learners as possible who stayed to the end of their course passed their qualifications. To do this, they put in place arrangements to support learners to complete assignments, and to ensure they were prepared for and attended examinations. Their actions achieved a reasonable degree of success. The proportion of learners on study programmes who passed their qualifications increased markedly, although it still requires further improvement. For the relatively small number of adult learners, the proportion who passed their qualifications also increased and is now high.

Underneath the broadly positive pass rates lie variations across different subjects. For example, pass rates increased and are now high in engineering, construction and equine studies. Pass rates in a few subjects, including animal care and arboriculture, did not improve. Some subjects performed well on one campus, but less well on the other. For example, pass rates on agriculture programmes improved and are high at Otley, but were static and require improvement at Easton. The converse is true for floristry, where learners at Easton performed very well, while those at Otley did not.

Managers have monitored where learners have gone who left courses early. The majority continued in education or started an apprenticeship. They also have good information on what learners do once they have gained their qualifications. Most go on to further study, apprenticeships or employment. Current learners are mostly aware of their options on completing their course. They have progression plans for after their course and are clear about what they need to do to successfully achieve this next step.

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

At the previous monitoring visit, leaders and managers had started to put in place suitable strategies to assess learners’ existing knowledge and skills, and to track their progress. Leaders and managers have focused staff training on strategies that help learners to make a good start on their courses. At the beginning of this term, teachers have been more diligent in assessing learners’ starting points, and most learners have target grades which they know. Through effective staff development, teachers are more skilled at using this information to plan and teach a curriculum that is matched to learners’ abilities. However, discrepancies remain in their ability to do this in teaching practical and theoretical components, with more success in the former.

Teachers, support staff and tutors have improved how they work together to help learners achieve. Through a revised and improved tutorial programme, staff have greater clarity about each aspect of a learner’s performance, across all aspects of their programmes.

Most teachers have high aspirations for their learners. However, they do not communicate clearly enough to learners what standards they should be working at by the end of their course, or how what they are learning fits into longer-term curriculum goals. On level 3 programmes, teachers do not push learners to greater independent inquiry or challenge them to achieve higher standards of work.

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? Reasonable progress
How effective have these actions been in improving the quality of learners’ experiences?

Governors and senior leaders maintain a very strong commitment to ensuring that each learner has a good experience at the college, and is taught well. Crucially, they have overcome most of the staffing issues that beset them in the previous year and are therefore able to provide a more consistent experience for learners.

Leaders and managers have continued to use advanced teaching and learning coaches to good effect to support new or under-performing staff. They have resolved earlier issues about where accountability for the quality of teaching lies, and curriculum managers are now better informed about their roles. Managers understand the quality assurance processes, including for evaluating the quality of teaching, and they are up-to-date in putting these into effect. For example, at the previous monitoring visit, managers had not completed their observations of teaching staff, but this is now done. Managers make effective use of the outcomes of these observations, along with other information, in their management of staff and their plans for professional development.

Most learners are motivated and respond well to teachers' guidance and support, but inconsistencies still exist across subjects and between the two campuses. Overall, managers have had slightly greater success at improving learners' experiences at Otley than at Easton. Teachers are also more confident and skilled at improving learners' knowledge of, and skills in, practical aspects of their courses than in developing their knowledge of theoretical components. At times, teachers give instructions to learners that are overly complicated or unclear, resulting in uncertainty about what needs to be done. Learners often do not sufficiently understand how what they are being taught fits into other parts of the curriculum, and how it relates to their longer-term development.

How effective have leaders and managers been in improving the attendance of learners on study programmes and adult learning programmes **Reasonable progress**

In 2018/19, managers had already implemented actions that resulted in learners' attendance improving. Towards the end of the year they changed the tutorial arrangements for 16 to 19-year-old learners and this, along with greater curriculum manager accountability, has had a beneficial impact. These arrangements continue into the current academic year and managers have made further reasonable progress in improving learners' attendance. Staff monitor attendance closely and take appropriate action to remedy issues encountered. Learners' attendance is better at the Otley campus, relative to the Easton Campus, and overall is just short of the college's target of 90%. Learners' attendance at English and mathematics lessons, while better than last year, requires further improvement.

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

For much of 2018/19 leaders and managers were unable to recruit and retain suitably qualified and experienced staff to teach English and mathematics. This overshadowed much of learners' experiences, which were not good enough.

Although modest gains were made in the proportion of learners who improved a grade in GCSE examinations, the proportion who achieved a grade 4 or above remained too low. In Functional Skills English, the proportion of learners who achieved a pass increased, but for mathematics it declined.

Governors and senior leaders remain acutely aware of the need for rapid improvement. They have resolved timetabling issues at the start of this academic year to ensure that learners' lessons are not disrupted in the early stages. They have ensured that learners are better informed about the importance of improving their knowledge and use of English and mathematics, and of gaining qualifications. For example, learners can explain how they use mathematical skills in their vocational training, such as in measuring plasterboard and achieving consistency in plaster mix to do a job correctly first time.

At the start of this academic year, staff improved their assessment of learners' existing knowledge and skills in English and mathematics. They use this information effectively to place learners on the correct programme. As a result, a higher proportion of learners this year are enrolled on functional skills qualifications at a level to which they are suited.

Managers have recruited suitable staff, and they continue to provide staff development and coaching to improve teachers' skills. They have ensured that teachers of vocational subjects, and those who teach English and mathematics, share information about learners' attendance and progress. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions.

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