

Birmingham Metropolitan College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Birmingham Metropolitan College was inspected in October 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.

The college operates from three main college campuses located in and around the Birmingham conurbation. Following the previous inspection and with the agreement of the Education and Skills Funding Agency, leaders took the decision to close the Stourbridge College campus. Students and apprentices based at the Stourbridge site were transferred to two other neighbouring colleges located in the Black Country.

Themes

What progress have governors made in holding senior leaders fully to account for making improvements outlined in the previous inspection report, including the rigour of reporting and monitoring arrangements? **Reasonable progress**

The board, under the stewardship of a newly appointed chair, has increased its level of focus and scrutiny of the actions being taken by leaders and managers to raise standards and promote improvement across the institution.

Governors skilfully use their collective experience and expertise to challenge senior leaders and support the college effectively. They analyse closely the extensive data and performance information received from senior leaders and are adept at requesting additional information where they need to further their understanding. For example, they have requested that reports presented to them regarding students' progress and performance be more evaluative and concise.

Link governors aligned to each of the college's main campuses enable the board to have a deeper and insightful understanding of the impact of actions being taken by leaders to secure improvement. Governors also conduct learning walks with college managers and meet with representatives of the student council to inform further their understanding of the quality of provision.

Following the publication of the inspection report, leaders and governors consulted widely with their stakeholders and developed a post-inspection action plan. However, the initial draft of the plan was overly complex. As a result, initial progress against some of the agreed actions was too inconsistent. Governors and leaders took decisive action to refine and sharpen the improvement planning process and a new

action plan was implemented in May 2019. The newly developed action plan is incisive and well-focused, providing clearly defined actions linked to appropriately challenging targets. Governors scrutinise the plan closely and hold the refreshed senior leadership team to robust account regularly for successful completion of challenging actions. As a result, progress has become more rapid, and actions taken are showing a positive impact on improving quality and raising standards.

How effective have leaders and managers been in ensuring that students, particularly on level 3 courses, are supported to make the progress of which they are capable, given their qualifications on entry? Reasonable progress

Following the previous inspection, leaders took decisive action and restructured the A-level team. They appointed a new experienced manager and recruited subject specialists, who brought with them much-needed expertise, and who were more skilled in teaching an academic curriculum. Teachers have embraced planned improvement strategies and share a determination with leaders and managers to improve students' learning experiences and enhance their performance.

As a result of targeted professional development, teachers involved in the delivery of both level 3 academic and vocational courses are becoming more skilled and confident in using a range of strategies that extend students' subject knowledge and understanding. They routinely use a range of pertinent information to identify accurately students' individual starting points and subsequently to inform their planning for learning.

Teachers now make sure that their lessons cover the necessary content required for students to achieve high grades. They regularly check learning in lessons and as a result they have a more informed understanding of how well students are progressing. Teachers now provide more consistent and regular feedback to students on what they do well and where they need to improve.

Curriculum leaders and course teams use evidence gathered from a range of performance assessment activities including in-class assessments and scheduled course work to identify accurately students' current progress and to plan improvement strategies where needed. However, it is too soon to judge whether these actions will result in all current students making substantial and sustained progress from their starting points. In addition, though college performance data for the prior year indicated that a higher proportion of level 3 students achieved the grades of which they are capable, too many performed below expectation.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that teachers are supported to develop the skills required to deliver challenging activities to students at different stages of their learning that deepen their understanding and broaden their knowledge? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have made effective use of external partner support to develop a revised and more focused approach towards staff development that reflects more closely the whole organisational needs. Leaders have also recently developed and introduced a new teaching, learning and assessment policy that sets out a more rigorous framework for the evaluation of teachers' practice across the college to assure learning. However, a few aspects of this policy require further refinement.

Leaders and managers use a wide range of information about teachers' performance to identify and plan for a range of professional development activities designed to enhance their teaching skills. Leaders have successfully refocused and repurposed the role of teaching and learning coaches. These staff are now assigned to individual college campus locations and as a result are more responsive in providing localised and targeted support for teachers, especially those whose lessons are judged as not meeting college standards. Teachers value the change in priorities that the new principal and leadership team have introduced towards improving their skills.

Leaders and managers now encourage curriculum teams to discuss and review routinely at weekly team meetings their individual approaches to the craft of teaching and learning and their impact upon students. Teachers appreciate the wide range of staff development and individual coaching they receive to improve specific aspects of their teaching.

In most cases, teachers are now well focused in planning learning that challenges students to make assured progress from their initial starting points. They are increasing in confidence and becoming adept in using a range of approaches that enable students to extend their knowledge and remember more. Teachers now provide students with more specific and helpful feedback on their work to ensure that they know what to do to improve. However, in a few areas across the college these new arrangements have not yet secured the consistently high standards to which leaders and managers aspire.

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