

Telford College of Arts and Technology

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Telford College of Arts and Technology following publication of the inspection report on 14 June 2016 which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness and for each of the key judgements: effectiveness of leadership and management; the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; personal development, behaviour and welfare; and outcomes for learners. All provision types inspected were judged inadequate, with the exception of the provision for learners with high needs which was good.

At the time of the monitoring visit, the interim principal had been in post for around four months and the new senior leadership team had been significantly restructured since the inspection. The draft post-inspection action plan was about to be merged with a full college recovery plan, pending a possible merger with a local sixth form college. Comprehensive position statements were available. This first monitoring visit concentrated on the post-inspection action plan, governance, performance management, apprenticeships, and teaching, learning and assessment.

Themes

The fitness for purpose of and the progress towards meeting the outcomes of the post-inspection action plan.

The draft of the post-inspection action plan captures the areas needing further improvement from the most recent inspection report. These include all the recommendations from the report and further work is under way to merge the post-inspection action plan with a full college recovery plan. Senior leaders constantly update the action plan in line with the progress made against each aspect.

The action plan is comprehensive and leaders suggest all actions are on schedule, despite the short timescale since the inspection. Each action is broken down into milestones which are date-critical and allocated to a responsible manager with the intention to ensure timely completion.

Leaders recognise that there is a risk of confusing the progress made so far with the intended and targeted impact on learners.

Priorities for improvement

- Make clear in the action plan how well progress is measured against the desired final outcomes and the impact on learners so far.
- Ensure the positive impetus for continuous improvements since the inspection is maintained.

What progress has been made to ensure the governing body has sufficient expertise and experience to oversee improvements in teaching, learning and assessment?

A thorough review, prior to and since the previous inspection, in the form of a skills audit, has identified areas of strength within the governing body and any deficiencies it may have. The review has correctly identified a lack of understanding of teaching, learning and assessment within the governing body, and actions have been taken to rectify this with the recent appointment of a specialist governor. Current governors admit they are not suitably skilled in understanding the key aspects of what makes a good teaching, learning and assessment session. Proposals to link governors with heads of school have not yet come to fruition due to a historical lack of appetite for this across the college. Governors and senior leaders are now keen for this to be implemented under the new regime.

Applications to join the governing board are under deliberation. The governing board search committee is considering appointing three new governors in the short term prior to any merger which may take place. There is a need to ensure any newly appointed governors have an understanding of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governors now receive much more reliable data and information; however, senior leaders are fully aware of the need to provide governors with more qualitative and detailed information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to help them improve their understanding of good or better learning sessions.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure governors have an improved appreciation of what good or better teaching sessions look like.
- Strengthen the governing board further by appointing members with a greater understanding of teaching, learning and assessment and the key improvement requirements of the college.

What have senior leaders done to ensure governors have an accurate picture of the performance of the college in regard to learners' progress and achievements?

Since the restructuring of the senior management team and the management information department, governors have much more confidence in the accuracy and reliability of reports and data they receive. Management information provided for managers and governors is now presented in a coherent and consistent manner and is much improved since the previous inspection. Governors now feel they have sufficient information, in the form of comprehensive business review documentation, to challenge senior leaders more effectively about the performance of the college.

Information governors receive is very visual and data-rich; therefore, there is still a need for further qualitative information, particularly around the quality of provision,

including teaching, learning and assessment. Senior leaders do have plans in place to provide this type of information for governors.

Governors are now able to challenge and probe further the information provided to them and have more confidence to enquire about the evidence that underpins the data and information provided.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure governors receive detailed and accurate reports and information to support teaching, learning and assessment data about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the college.
- Ensure the proposed business review reports passed to governors are up to date and contain information regarding the progress learners are making and the proportion who have achieved against their minimum and aspirational targets.

How effectively are managers tackling underperformance across the college?

Following the previous inspection, governors and senior leaders have taken decisive actions to improve performance across all areas of the college. Through thoughtful consideration, the senior leadership team has been significantly restructured and strengthened, with new appointments and interim managers appointed where necessary. The revised senior leadership team works much better as a group. Teamwork is developing well across the college.

Staff in business support areas and teaching staff at all levels are now more aware of their responsibilities and are accountable for well-intentioned key performance indicators. Business planning and a target-setting process for middle managers have been introduced. These include regular and detailed business and quality reviews, reflecting the new approach to teamworking. Managers and staff at all levels are accountable for their learners or areas of responsibility. Data and information provided for managers are now much more reliable. Governors, senior leaders and managers have an increased confidence in the data they receive. Managers use data far more effectively to monitor the performance of staff and learners.

Managers and staff have made a concentrated effort to help as many current learners complete their qualifications as possible and are predicting a small increase in the proportion of learners who achieve their targets. Senior leaders and managers have established detailed protocols and procedures for new learners joining the college to ensure learners are on the correct course to meet their needs and aspirations. Managers and teaching staff are now challenged to provide a rationale for their courses which includes delivery models, assessment criteria and a detailed scheme of work.

Through well-intentioned professional development sessions, managers and teaching staff have a much better understanding of the requirements of teaching, learning and assessment, the key use of information and data and the key focus on learners' progress. Managers have introduced a weekly professional development calendar for the new term. Teaching staff will need to be directed to this as part of their actions from teaching, learning and assessment observations and their performance review appraisal.

Staff are appreciative of the interventions made since the inspection and believe the culture of the college is now more supportive and team-focused, while at the same time challenging. Communication channels across the college are much improved.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure all staff are fully aware of their responsibilities to their learners and for the operational effectiveness of the college.
- Ensure actions from staff performance reviews and teaching, learning and assessment observations lead to effective professional development opportunities, so staff are able to perform at the desired level and improve their practice.

What interventions have been put in place to ensure apprentices make more rapid progress and achieve their qualifications within their timescales?

Managers now have access to more accurate data on apprentices. Since the previous inspection, managers have significantly reduced the proportion of apprentices who were out of funding and, as a result, overall success rates have improved. Programme managers check information on apprentices carefully so that the resulting data is now accurate and reliable. Managers and assessors are now able to use this data to track the progress apprentices make. Apprentices' achievement within their agreed timescales continues to be low as a result of apprentices having previously missed their completion targets before the introduction of this change.

Since the previous inspection, managers have ensured that there are more frequent meetings to support improvements. The apprenticeship manager meets weekly with programme managers who in turn have weekly meetings with each assessor. Assessors meet monthly with apprentices. All staff have clear responsibilities and are held to greater account for their performance.

Managers have also devised new planning documents to ensure that each of apprentices, tutors and employers are aware of the qualification outcomes, how they will be delivered and expectations at any given time about the progress that apprentices should be making. In addition, managers have devised new apprentice profiles and a new individual learning plan. Managers are aware of the need to engage employers fully in the new processes.

To address the weak understanding of equality and diversity and British values identified during the inspection, managers have devised a monthly newsletter with 'hot topics' and questions for assessors to use to develop learners' understanding of these issues. A separate newsletter to develop and extend apprentices' understanding of English and mathematics is also in use.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that, as a result of the new sharper focus on the tracking and monitoring of learners' progress, apprentices achieve their qualifications on time.
- Ensure that the many new processes devised for use in the new academic year are rigorously evaluated early on to determine their impact on learners' progress.
- Ensure that employers are engaged in the new review processes and take ownership of their part in apprentices' training.

What has been done to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all subject areas, including discrete English and mathematics provision?

The new interim manager for curriculum and quality is in the process of reviewing and revising the observation of teaching and learning process. The manager has produced new guidance and supporting forms that aim to simplify the process and ensure a greater focus on learning. The new arrangements have yet to be drawn together into a new teaching and learning strategy document.

At the previous inspection, line managers were responsible for observing and evaluating their teaching staff. The new arrangements will see heads of school observing and evaluating teachers they do not line-manage, while supporting and coaching those that they directly line-manage. All heads of schools are currently receiving training to support them in their new role.

Managers intend that the outcomes from observations will be used more effectively. The outcomes of the observation of teaching will inform the new staff performance review arrangements and also inform the weekly staff development sessions. Where teachers do not meet expected standards in teaching, they will be re-observed within six weeks. If they are still not meeting requirements after a second re-observation, then managers will call a case review meeting. During this process, teaching and learning coaches will provide the specialist support for teachers to improve their practice. Currently two vacancies exist for this role.

The curriculum and quality manager is providing bespoke training for the English and mathematics team with a focus on planning, assessment strategies, target-setting and feedback.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that the new arrangements for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment are summarised in a clear policy/strategy document and disseminated to all staff.
- Ensure that the vacant teaching and learning coaching roles are quickly filled so that teachers who need extra support receive it in a timely manner.

Do all staff have high expectations and ambitions for learners? Are lessons challenging, inspiring and meeting the needs of all learners? Do teachers provide clear and meaningful feedback that helps learners to improve? Do teachers set and monitor challenging targets which enable learners to achieve their potential?

At the previous inspection, 16 to 19 study programmes were judged to be inadequate because of low attendance, poor English and mathematics results, slow progress by learners, teachers not developing learners' independent learning skills and poor target-setting.

Managers have taken steps to begin to address these issues. Immediately after the inspection, for the remaining part of the term, managers ensured that extra staff were deployed to physically check learners were in classrooms and to quickly follow up those not attending. This resulted in an immediate improvement in attendance for the last few weeks of the term. Managers are also aware of the need to have registers and class lists that are reliable and accurate and the need to give greater consideration to how learners are grouped in order to support improved attendance.

Senior leaders have appointed two internal interim managers as head of English and head of mathematics to support improvements in these curriculum areas. Managers have devised a new model of delivery to ensure that learners have regular opportunities to assess themselves internally prior to an external examination. Managers have asked each curriculum area to give a number of examples of how teachers use English and mathematics in their subject, so that the central team can relate their teaching to learners' vocations. Managers have also carefully planned timetables for English and mathematics to ensure that classes sit alongside vocational lessons to improve attendance.

Managers have introduced more rigour into course planning by requiring every course to outline the rationale for their approach in terms of the balance between theory and practical aspects, the approach to assessment and how they will challenge learners. In the new academic year, teaching will start a week later to ensure that information from learners' initial assessment is utilised fully to place them on the right course and level with appropriate support where required. Managers will also require course leaders to assess learners within the first six weeks so that they have a good indication of the level that learners are working at. Managers have an expectation that most learners will be challenged to achieve at a level at least one higher than their minimum grade in their first assignment. This sets

the tone for high aspirations early in the course. Managers are aware of the need to continue to improve the progress that learners make, particularly on level 3 programmes.

To improve assessment, managers have challenged curriculum leads to revisit the pattern of assessment on their courses. As a result, most programmes have regular ongoing assessment rather than end-of-year assessment. Additionally, heads of school have been asked to have individual meetings with teachers about their assessment strategies. This will be supplemented by a more focused use of learning walks to check assessed work. Leaders are aware of the need to train and support heads of departments to carry this role out effectively.

Senior leaders and managers have used the end-of-year staff development programme to focus on key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, including independent learning, integrating equality and diversity, meeting individual learners' needs and effective use of feedback and target-setting. Managers have asked all teachers to provide a scheme of work for the first six weeks of the term to include these aspects alongside stretch and challenge. They will audit and monitor these schemes of work closely. Managers are aware of the need to revise and update frequently the information that they include in group profiles and to provide further training on how they can be used effectively in lessons.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure that attendance information from registers and class lists is accurate and closely monitored so that learners who fail to attend are quickly followed up.
- Ensure that teachers encourage learners to have high expectations early in their programme and that they continuously challenge learners to stretch for the highest possible grade.
- Ensure that course leaders further develop the use of information on learners' starting points to set realistic, yet challenging, targets for learners' achievement of key components of their programme.
- Ensure that there is a clear and consistent understanding of what constitutes a 'group profile' and how teachers can use them to support learners to make good progress.
- Ensure that heads of schools are trained to identify precisely and reliably how well assessment strategies are working and to coach and develop teaching staff in their effective use of assessment.

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