

Heart of Worcestershire College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Heart of Worcestershire College was inspected in October 2023. 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 resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Heart of Worcestershire College is a large general further education college based across the county of Worcestershire. The college has three main sites: Worcester, Redditch and Bromsgrove. The college also has two specialist construction centres in Malvern and Redditch and the Duckworth Centre of Engineering in Worcester. The college works with nine subcontracting partners. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 2,619 learners on education programmes for young people. There were 1,258 adult learners studying courses at entry level to level 5, of which 86 learners were studying on advanced learner loans. There were 290 learners with high needs, 191 of these learners study on foundation-level courses to help them to prepare for independence and work. There were 326 apprentices studying at levels 2 to 5, approximately half of whom were over the age of 19.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made to improve the consistency and quality of teaching that learners and apprentices receive across subjects and college campuses?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have improved their curriculum planning so that teachers at the college can work together to agree their approaches to teaching and assessment activities. For example, teachers teaching learners with high needs who work across different campuses work together to agree lesson structure such as the use of recap and assessment. This has led to improvements in the quality of teaching across campuses.

Leaders and managers share information from their quality assurance activities and use this to plan staff training. Teachers frequently take part in useful professional development that helps them to understand what high-quality teaching looks like. In apprenticeships, teachers have received training to help them use a wider range of assessment strategies in lessons.

Leaders have been successful in creating a culture where teachers are encouraged to take ownership of their professional development. They ensure that teachers reflect

on their teaching practice and together with their managers they devise clear action plans. Teachers receive frequent feedback and challenge from leaders and managers which helps them to understand what they need to do to improve.

Leaders rightly recognise that the quality of teaching, although improving, is not yet consistent across all subjects and campuses. For example, in a few instances, the effectiveness of questioning used by teachers does not sufficiently challenge learners and apprentices to develop their skills and knowledge. Leaders have plans in place to train and develop teachers' use of questioning in lessons to ensure that improvements continue.

What progress have leaders and managers made to improve governance and those arrangements that hold leaders to account?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have recruited new board members to strengthen their governance arrangements. They have recruited members with the relevant educational skills and expertise to enhance the skill set of the governance board. The board members have worked hard to understand the business and learn more about teaching and learning. They are increasingly involved in activities that bring them closer to the learning experience of learners and apprentices such as curriculum review meetings. As a result, they are better able to question and challenge leaders about teaching and learning.

Governors have undertaken a series of development activities to help them challenge senior leaders and the information they receive. They are beginning to demonstrate academic leadership and offer critical suggestions with the aim of improving teaching and learning. Governors have formed a teaching and learning committee which is led by an education experienced governor. Members of this committee scrutinise the quality of teaching and feed their detailed analysis and findings to the rest of the board. This supports governors to become better informed about the quality of teaching offered across the college.

Governors access a wide range of information to help them become better equipped and informed about how different curriculum subjects perform. They rightly recognise they need to broaden their understanding of success measures and the impact of the curriculum, beyond achievement rates and attendance.

What progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that all learners and apprentices receive high-quality careers education, information advice and guidance?

Reasonable progress

Teachers share useful information with learners about sector-relevant skills that will support them in their future careers. For example, younger learners studying motor vehicle are taught about the value of gaining an MOT testing certificate or the benefits of being able to map and customise engine performance. Learners understand these skills will improve their future employment prospects.

Managers and teachers ensure that employers and education partners are actively involved in curriculum design and delivery. Health and social care learners benefit from guest speakers who are occupational health specialists. They visit universities to understand their options for social care-related degrees.

Teachers ensure that apprentices meet with staff from the careers advice team. Careers staff talk to apprentices about the range of opportunities available to them and show them helpful careers advice resources and online tools. Teachers discuss careers and next steps during reviews with apprentices.

In a few instances, learners are not sufficiently clear about the steps they need to take to achieve their future career aspirations. For example, learners who wish to move on to competitive university courses are not aware of the additional steps required such as selection interviews or portfolio submission.

What progress have leaders and managers made to increase the rigour of their quality assurance across all curriculum subjects, including those provided by subcontractors?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have introduced processes to increase the rigour of quality assurance across subjects. Leaders and managers closely monitor outcomes from assessments and stakeholder feedback to identify any staff that need support and intervention to help them improve. For example, in GCSE English, leaders have taken action to improve teachers' curriculum planning and teaching. These improvements have increased the number of learners who successfully achieve their qualification.

Leaders have appointed staff to have closer oversight of quality of education. They have prioritised time and staff resources so that the quality of teaching can be quickly assessed. Leaders clearly understand which staff need the most support to improve. Through paired monitoring activities leaders are assured of the reliability and accuracy in judgements about the quality of teaching.

Leaders have introduced lesson visits across subjects to help managers swiftly identify and establish strengths and areas for improvement in teaching. They use the information from these activities to plan and monitor the impact of staff training. Through feedback, teachers are clear on the expectations leaders have for high-quality teaching.

Leaders have been involved with the curriculum development for their new subcontracted provision. They have carried out appropriate checks to ensure that subcontractors have appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Staff at the new subcontractor are clear on senior leaders' expectations for high-quality education.

Leaders do not yet have sufficient oversight of subcontractor partners that they already work with. They have plans in place to increase the rigour of quality

assurance to bring this in line with the rest of their courses. Initial meetings have been scheduled. However, at the time of the monitoring visit, they had not yet taken place.

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