

Sussex Coast College

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Sussex Coast College is a medium-sized general further education college. The college operates from two campuses based in Hastings. The college offers provision in all 14 subject areas ranging from entry to higher education. It provides apprenticeship training, and also adult and community education in venues belonging to local partner organisations. Some of the college's higher education courses are based at the new University Centre Hastings, which is part of the University of Brighton.

The most recent inspection report was published in January 2012. The college was graded inadequate in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management. Of the four subject areas inspected, construction and arts, media and publishing were graded as satisfactory; science and mathematics, and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) were graded inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How much progress has been made in developing the governing body to take greater responsibility for the monitoring and action planning for improvement of weaker provision?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, governance was judged to be inadequate. This judgement came as a significant disappointment to the governing body, which immediately instigated a thorough review of its work. Governors recognise they could have been more diligent and determined that they should not find themselves in the same position again. They took decisive action and recruited a new and experienced senior management team. Governors can now clearly and confidently articulate the comprehensive measures recently implemented to inform them of college performance against realistic targets. They have gained confidence in their understanding and use of data. A senior member of the governing body attends the recently introduced principal's performance reviews, which regularly monitor the effectiveness of improvement measures at course level. The college has undergone significant changes to its culture with regard to performance management, and early indications of improvement are positive. However, governors are clear that the key challenge for the college is to implement fully the new quality assurance arrangements, to secure significant and sustained improvements.

How effective have new quality improvement arrangements been in improving functional skills provision? Significant progress

In 2010/11, the overall success rate for functional skills, at 27%, was considerably below the national average of 63%. Since the previous inspection, managers have undertaken a fundamental review of functional skills and recruited a new manager with substantial experience of delivering functional skills to a high standard. They have introduced a thorough system for monitoring students' progress in functional skills that effectively supports learners at risk of failure. Curriculum heads are now fully accountable for success rates in functional skills, and they monitor closely actions to improve the provision. Students now have to demonstrate their capability to pass the examination before being allocated a test date. Managers have implemented a comprehensive review of the teaching and learning of functional skills, and provided training sessions for all functional skill teachers in order to share best practice. Around half of the foundation and intermediate students enrolled for functional skills in the current year have already taken the examination, and 50% of these students have passed. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year. College predictions indicate that the current improvement in outcomes should be at least sustained once all enrolled students have taken the examination.

Outcomes for learners**What progress has been made in improving retention rates at advanced level? Significant progress**

In 2010/11, retention rates for advanced level students on long courses and apprenticeships were significantly below the national average. At the time of the previous inspection, systems to monitor students' progress were being implemented but had not had sufficient time to improve retention rates. Since then, the procedures for monitoring students' progress have been well established and now effectively track those at risk of withdrawal or non-achievement of the qualification. Managers at all levels of the organisation ensure that actions to support students at risk are very closely monitored. In the current year, reliable college retention data show an improvement for students aged 16 to 18 of 13 percentage points, and for adult students on long courses of 17 percentage points, compared to 2010/11. Success rates for apprentices have also significantly improved this year.

Quality of provision**What progress has been made in effectively assessing the quality of learning in lessons? Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, the college accurately identified that the teaching and learning observation scheme was insufficiently rigorous. Since then, a number of substantial changes have been made. Managers have implemented changes quickly and there is much more focus on judging the quality of learning during observations. For the first time, all teaching staff and learning support staff have been observed.

The lesson observation team is in the process of completing training leading to accreditation, to ensure greater rigour in assessing the quality of learning.

Teachers who are awarded satisfactory or unsatisfactory grades receive appropriate support and development, and re-observation. Some have improved, some are on capability procedures, and others have chosen to leave. The current grade profile more accurately identifies the variation in practice across curriculum areas and managers are now in a better position to address identified weaknesses. Teacher training, tutorial support and additional learning support are now much more closely linked to teaching and learning in the college.

All of these changes have the potential to transform and improve students' experiences in the college. However, they are very new and it is too early to judge their impact.

What progress has been made in improving the use of initial assessment to plan lessons effectively to meet the needs of all students? **Reasonable progress**

Previously, it was judged that teachers did not take sufficient account of students' prior attainment or identified learning needs to plan lessons effectively. Since then, the college has further developed a range of procedures to improve the use of initial assessment, which is now more rigorous and timely. Teachers and the staff who provide initial guidance and support now communicate with each other more effectively about students' needs.

All teaching staff receive group profiles that include details of students' literacy and numeracy skills. They have also received training to help them use these profiles to plan lessons more effectively to meet students' needs. Additional learning support staff are beginning to work with specific curriculum areas in order to support teachers' lesson planning. Teaching and learning coaches and learning facilitators in functional skills also assist with lesson planning, and teachers have received training on the tracking and monitoring of students' progress. However, college managers recognise that further work is needed to ensure that lesson planning, progress tracking and support for students are fully integrated and effective.

How much progress has been made in implementing a comprehensive additional learning support strategy? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, care, guidance and support for students were judged inadequate. Since then, a review of the additional learning support (ALS) has been completed and a comprehensive strategy was published in April 2012. Managers have identified key performance indicators and clarified the roles and responsibilities of staff. Progress records for students receiving additional support are now more accurate and up to date, and more students have been supported by the ALS team. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress by teachers and tutors have

improved, and good practice has been identified in some areas of the college. Improved communications between teachers, tutors and support staff have led to additional support being offered to students more efficiently. The introduction of intensive personal support for vulnerable learners has been successful, and staff speak positively about the effective way in which support is coordinated and external agencies are used to help students.

The college has invested in additional training for support workers and all learning facilitators have been observed for their effectiveness. Managers recognise that a key outcome from the observations is that staff and students need continuing training to ensure that students' personal learning targets are sensible, relevant and quantitative.

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