

Accrington and Rossendale College

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

In September 2012 the college sponsored the opening of The Hyndburn Studio School. During the first year of its operation it became clear that the school was not sustainable into a second year due to low recruitment numbers. Following discussions with the Department for Education, the Studio School Trust, the school's trust board, and governors from the school and college, the college took the decision to apply for direct entry for students aged 14 to 16 as a solution to the cohort completing their Key Stage 4 education. No enrolments were made in September 2013 and with the completion of the current cohort the provision will close in July 2014.

At the time of the visit, 18 students were enrolled on 14 to 16 full-time provision. The majority of students enrolled have a history of poor attendance throughout their Key Stage 3 education. Students follow one of four vocational pathways. Forty-four per cent of the students enrolled are eligible for the pupil premium. This monitoring visit examined the progress made to date against the themes identified in this report and focused solely on the 14 to 16 full-time provision.

Themes

What progress has the college made in implementing clear admissions and exclusion policies for its 14 to 16 provision?

Significant

Admissions and enrolment procedures and processes are clear and well understood by parents, students and staff. Transition processes are well organised and focused on supporting students through the initial weeks of their courses and introducing them to a college setting. As a result of the experiences of the first six months, procedures have been reviewed and appropriate changes made. Although the college has developed good relationships with parents and carers, it acknowledges that more could be done to use their views to inform improvement. Parents and carers have signed appropriate consent and indemnity forms.

The discipline and behaviour policy is defined well and clearly communicated to students, staff, parents and carers. Students were involved in discussions on the design of some aspects of the behaviour policy and this proved an incentive for them to accept greater responsibility for their behaviour and conduct. Exclusion policies are clear and understood by students, staff, parents and carers. Staff have embedded strong anti-bullying and antisocial behaviour policies across the curriculum and within tutorial provision.

The initial months of the course proved a challenging time. Prior student data on attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour was very limited. Initially, local high schools raised concerns about the establishment of a studio school. The college, high

schools and local authority have worked through the initial concerns and more productive discussions and partnerships have now been established.

What progress has the college made in providing sufficient, appropriately qualified staff to lead and teach the provision and to support the learners?

Significant

Teachers have relevant subject and vocational experience and expertise. All teachers have qualified teacher status. Some managers and teachers have recent secondary school experience. Tutors on the vocational courses have relevant industrial and work-related experience and this has been a strong contributing factor in encouraging students to develop work-related ambitions. Students have developed positive attitudes to education and this has enabled them to establish clear and realistic future career plans.

Managers are effective in planning the operational day-to-day delivery and organisation of provision. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together to ensure that students are supported fully throughout teaching sessions and that any prospective issues are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Staff development programmes provide effective training to deal with challenging behaviour, health issues, classroom management and a variety of potential individual students' needs. The school's 14 to 16 team meets regularly to review students' progress as well as to share the best and most effective practice in teaching. The college has appropriate arrangements for staff to share good practice across the college. Teaching assistants and support staff are adroit in meeting the additional learning needs of students. Teaching assistants play a key role in tackling instances of poor behaviour and in building students' confidence and positive attitudes to work.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that the curriculum is sufficiently broad and covers all statutory subjects?

Reasonable

Students follow one of four vocational programme pathways in catering, automotive engineering, sport or media. English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology form a core curriculum. In addition the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is taught through focused groups. Religious education and the exploration of value systems are not referenced sufficiently in the college's documentation and planning. All students have two periods of physical education weekly.

The college has a well-structured tutorial programme covering a wide range of topics including 'the wider world' and 'citizenship', and activities such as developing curriculum vitae, researching possible careers and tracking individual progress. Form

sessions are also used to raise students' awareness of equality and diversity through studying events of historical consequence including the holocaust and the First World War. Guest speakers are used effectively to enliven learning and reference real-life situations. Staff promote healthy lifestyles. Students have group assemblies where there are opportunities for them to engage in reflections and catch up with school, college, curriculum and recreational notices.

All students recognise the progress they have made since starting their programme, particularly their increased understanding of literacy and improved communication skills. All students expressed an intention to continue in vocational education once their current programme had finished.

Students benefit from accessing relevant work experience as part of their programme. All students attend one day of work experience each week. The college takes great care to match students with work experience commensurate with the students' aspirations. For example, one catering student carried out work experience in a school, supporting the tutor in cookery classes. This aided the student in making an informed choice on whether teaching would be a fulfilling career. Another student, aspiring to train as a hospice nurse, accessed appropriate work experience in a care home by supporting elderly residents. Students apply themselves well in their work-experience activities and form good relationships with supervisors and staff. They gain confidence and make a worthwhile contribution in the workplace. However, the college does not set targets and agreed outcomes sufficiently with the work placement, or the student, to determine a structured programme which would contribute directly to the students' learning within the college.

What progress has the college made in quality assuring and evaluating all aspects of the provision for continuous improvement?

Reasonable

The college's quality assurance processes are clear and appropriate for reviewing the strengths and areas for improvement of 14 to 16 provision. Course reviews are comprehensive and regular. Students' progress is monitored thoroughly. Initial assessment tests in English and mathematics established a clear agenda for individual students' learning needs and support strategies. Progress tracking is thorough. The progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is monitored comprehensively and action plans put in place should any student fall behind expected progress. Senior leaders are effective in deploying well-qualified and highly committed staff. However, there are sometimes inconsistencies in the application of quality assurance procedures. For example, teachers do not always adhere to the marking policy. Students' progress across the provision is variable. Progress in vocational subjects and in English is strong and reasonable in mathematics. Progress is slower in science and information and communication technology. The impact of improvements in literacy and numeracy is not always apparent in the written work in students' files.

The college's system of observations of teaching and learning has been effective in improving the quality of taught sessions. Since September 2013, the college has carried out 12 observations of teaching sessions on the 14 to 16 programmes. The observation programme links well to a rolling programme of staff development focused on improving aspects of teaching and learning. Where the impact on students' learning is judged to require improvement, tutors, when re-observed, have improved the grade following focused staff development and/or mentorship support.

Progress target setting is comprehensive and students recognise where they have improved and where they need to improve further. Staff assess students' progress regularly. Many students show a pride in the progress they have made since starting their course at the college. Reports on progress to parents and carers are regular.

What progress has the college made in providing learners with sufficient student care, guidance and support, including the implementation of a behaviour policy appropriate for learners aged 14 to 16?

Significant

Students recognise that their behaviour and attitude to learning has improved significantly since they enrolled at the college. Students described the impact of this process as helping them to be calmer and more thoughtful, and that they now know how to attain aims and objectives, which are clear. Many students had historically poor attendance and academic records at school. The college's support systems are strong and effective. Tutors, support workers and teachers know their students. Attendance rates for many students have improved significantly. Staff use rewards well to recognise good achievement and performance.

Students wear identity badges. The college's expectations on behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning are clear to students. The behaviour policy has been reviewed in the light of experience. The initial few weeks of this provision presented many challenges for teachers, tutors and managers. Much effort has gone into establishing better behaviour and more positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is now good in many lessons. However, in a small minority of lessons, action to tackle poor behaviour is taken too slowly and consequently the learning of other students is interrupted.

Has the college implemented appropriate measures to ensure that all learners are reasonably safeguarded and that it meets its statutory duty for safeguarding in relation to learners of this age group?

Yes

The college complies with its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and child-protection legislation. Health and safety are reinforced throughout the areas and facilities used by students. Risk assessments in vocational workshops are thorough and appropriate. All staff have accessed appropriate training in the safeguarding of young people.

Students confirmed that they felt secure and safe within and around the college site. Students have a dedicated entrance to their area with secure classrooms and a leisure base. They are supervised within the vocational workshops and other college-wide subject locations. They meet each morning for breakfast and also have breaks, tutorials and assemblies within their dedicated school area. They have a student common room which they keep neat and tidy.

The college has a 'no tolerance' policy on bullying and harassment, which is communicated clearly to students. When incidences of bullying and harassment occur students say they are dealt with quickly. The tutorial programme includes topics that help to develop students' awareness of personal safety including the safe use of the internet. Students are confident that they can approach tutors and teachers on issues which are of concern to them.

Strengths and areas of weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Many lessons are structured well and build on previous learning effectively. However, the effectiveness of strategies to keep students fully engaged throughout sessions sometimes varies between tutors. A few sessions are disrupted by poor behaviour from individuals, which has an impact upon the effectiveness and pace of other students' learning.

Generally students work well independently, in pairs and in groups. In an English lesson where learning was particularly good, students were challenged to explore the language and imagery of a Wilfred Owen poem. They were highly focused throughout the activities and were excited by the challenges of Owen's war imagery and use of language. They explored the language through reading aloud, using the words within their own writing, through the choice of particular stanzas and lines and by explaining and exploring their meaning individually, in pairs and as a class. The lesson was exciting and all were enriched and motivated.

Tutors and in-class teaching assistants work well together to support students throughout teaching sessions. The small class sizes and good teamwork between

tutors and support assistants ensure that high levels of support are readily available when needed.

Equality and diversity are integrated well across provision. In a very well-organised sports theory lesson students were challenged to explore stereotyping. Images of different individuals were flashed on a screen and students were required to give an instant impression. Each of these images was then explored in detail and students' instant views were contrasted with the real backgrounds of the individuals. In a very well-paced session, stereotyping issues were explored and students developed a fuller understanding of how instant judgements can inform prejudice. The session then moved on to stereotyping in sports.

All tutors use information and learning technologies well within the classroom. In a tutorial, a presentation included well-researched photographs, maps and videos to provide relevance to current news topics. The well-developed resources aided students' understanding and interest. Students used electronic tablets during some sessions as an aid to learning.

Assessments are marked frequently. However, teachers do not always adhere to the college's marking policy. Teachers' comments do not always point to the next step of development for students nor is there evidence of a dialogue between student and teacher about marking and its impact upon improved written work or general understanding. The impact of students' improved literacy skills is not always evident in their written work within portfolios. While these contained corrections to spelling errors, the same errors occurred later in the file.

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