

Cirencester College

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

Unique reference number:	130686
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Inspection dates:	21 and 22 May 2025
Type of provider:	Sixth form college
Address:	Fosse Way Campus Stroud Road Cirencester Gloucestershire GL7 1XA

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Cirencester College was inspected in March 2024. 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.

Cirencester College is a sixth-form college in Cirencester, Gloucestershire. The college provides a range of academic, vocational and technical courses and apprenticeships from pre-entry level to level 4, and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the monitoring visit, around 2,800 learners aged 16 to 18, around 200 adult learners and 100 apprentices were studying at the college. There were around 50 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and in receipt of high needs funding, studying on academic or vocational programmes.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to improve initial advice and guidance for learners so that they study the right course?

Significant progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders, governors and staff have been relentless in prioritising and tackling the weaknesses identified. Leaders have carefully developed a college-wide project to individually analyse their approach to each of the areas for improvement. They have consulted with staff, students and external consultants at each step to ensure they are making the right decisions for learners. Because of their approach, leaders have rapidly gained the commitment of staff and created a collaborative culture where improvement is valued highly by all. As a part of this project, leaders and staff have committed fully to transforming their enrolment processes to ensure that they now place every learner on the right course for them.

Leaders recognised that every interaction with both prospective and existing learners was an opportunity for staff to advise learners about their options. They carefully considered each of these and reframed the focus of events such as open days so that staff used these opportunities to thoroughly inform learners about what they can expect from their subjects. Leaders train staff who are involved in providing guidance to learners using a series of 'product knowledge' sessions led by academic staff. This gives staff confidence to suggest alternative course options, for example

where learners have not achieved the required entry qualifications for their original choices. Leaders and teachers implemented a new version of their 'flying start' programme to further support learners at the pre-enrolment stage. This is a mixture of information and pre-enrolment preparation work that culminates in a series of initial assessments when learners start their courses. These actions have contributed to a marked increase in learners' attendance in class and a substantial reduction in learners leaving their courses before completion or making changes to their programmes.

What progress have leaders made to improve the assessment of learners at the start and during their courses?

Significant progress

Following the previous inspection, leaders and teachers responded rapidly to improve the experiences of the learners who were due to sit their final examinations in that year. Leaders worked carefully with teachers to check that each assessment carried out with learners helped to prepare them for their final assessments and gave learners a reliable indication of their progress. Results at the end of last academic year were better than expected due to the immediate actions undertaken.

Teachers now carry out a thorough assessment of what learners know and can do at the start of their courses. Teachers use the results of these activities to plan teaching and identify learners who need additional support. Teachers carefully plan their assessment schedules from these initial activities to prepare learners for their final assessments. For example, they plan essays together in class before gradually increasing the amount learners complete independently. This helps learners to understand what to include in their answers and builds their confidence in extended writing. Teachers are now provided with learners' prior qualifications so that they can use these to broadly measure learners' progress from their starting points and identify learners who are at risk of falling behind.

Leaders and teachers introduced a series of monitoring grades at the start of this academic year. These provide learners and parents with a comprehensive assessment of learners' progress and potential grades they could achieve. Learners value these highly as they can see the results of their efforts and understand where to focus their attention. Teachers and leaders check each assessment to ensure that it fits well with the sequence of learning and that teachers' appraisals of learners' work are accurate. This means that teachers and leaders can use these grades as a reliable indicator of learners' progress and provide support and praise appropriately.

What progress have leaders made to increase the number of young learners and learners with high needs taking part in high-quality work experience placements? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have increased the availability of work experience and work-related activities for learners. Learners studying T-levels now complete good-quality placements. Leaders have been ambitious in enabling more learners who study A-level subjects to undertake work experience or an appropriate interaction with the world of work. Consequently, the large minority of learners who study A-level subjects now participate in meaningful activities to gain experience of the workplace.

Leaders have taken action to improve the availability and quality of work experience for learners with high needs. Most learners with high needs now complete work experience and most use what they learn well to improve their knowledge of the subjects they are studying. Managers and teachers who support those learners with SEND and high needs work closely with employers to ensure learners' work placements are tailored to their needs. They take full account of the workplace environments learners will be going into to ensure that their needs can be met.

Leaders set high expectations for managers and staff in curriculum areas to encourage and support the creation of meaningful work experience for their learners. Leaders provide staff with useful professional development so that they gain practical knowledge about how to implement and support learners' work experience. Leaders have improved the recording of learners' participation in work experience activities. Consequently, learners know what knowledge and skills they are gaining, and leaders gain greater assurance that meaningful work experience is taking place.

A minority of learners do not know how the work-related activity they undertake contributes to the subject they are studying. A small minority of A-level learners who are near the end of their first year are not aware of when work experience opportunities will be available to them. They do not value the online alternative to work experience provided to them and gain little from their interaction with this system.

What progress have leaders made to increase and improve stakeholder engagement in the curriculum design for education programmes for young people and learners with high needs?

Significant progress

The actions that leaders have taken have been very effective in increasing the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of the college's curriculums. Leaders' actions have added a significant number of new employers to the college's employer forums. Leaders, as part of their improvement strategy, have raised expectations of curriculum managers and teachers to work with stakeholders to improve and develop the content of the curriculums which learners are studying.

Curriculum managers and teachers have made positive progress in working more productively with stakeholders to ensure that learners are taught the knowledge and gain the skills that employers and higher education providers need. For example, teachers of A-level business spoke with an external stakeholder and recognised that the marketing content of the course was outdated. Because of this, learners now learn more about social media and podcasting. Learners studying the T-level in early years learn how to use online shared documents in response to this being specified as an important industry requirement by a partner university.

Teachers of A-level subjects now work with higher education providers who receive the college's learners, to align the content of their respective curriculums. This has been particularly useful in T-level subjects, where the strong dialogue between the college's curriculum staff and universities has helped the universities to improve their knowledge of T-levels and the curriculum content in them. Leaders have established strong links with the NHS and this has resulted in learners from a range of different T-levels obtaining placements in the NHS in clinical and non-clinical services. Learners studying content creation and media production are gaining valuable experience of data analysis and presentation in a real work context.

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