Moulton College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Jai Sharda HMI
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Type of provider:	Specialist further education college
Address:	West Street Moulton Northampton NN3 7RR

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to Moulton College following publication of the inspection report on 3 April 2018, which found the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, leadership and management and personal development, behaviour and welfare. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners required improvement. Of the four provision types inspected, inspectors judged apprenticeships and provision for students with high needs to be inadequate, and 16 to 19 study programmes and adult learning programmes to require improvement.

At the time of the monitoring visit, the interim principal had been in post for four weeks. The director for quality and student support and the quality improvement and standards manager are also new to the college. Members of the senior leadership team decided that the 2016 self-assessment report provided an inaccurate and unreliable assessment of the college's key strengths and weaknesses. They have replaced this with a detailed post-inspection action plan to address the areas for improvement found during the inspection.

Themes

What plans have senior managers put in place to address the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection in relation to the safety of students and apprentices when undertaking activities at the college?

Senior managers have responded swiftly to tackle the weaknesses identified during the previous inspection relating to the safety and welfare of students and apprentices. They commissioned an external specialist to carry out a thorough health and safety review and implemented a range of measures that included extensive staff training in health and safety and in managing students' behaviour in classrooms and in workshops. Teachers provide all students and apprentices with extensive guidance and clear instructions on the use of safety glasses and ear defenders when carrying out tasks that necessitate their use. The introduction of regular 'toolbox talks' in the construction workshops helps to reinforce safety messages for students working in the workshops.

Managers have also responded to concerns about who holds overall responsibility for health and safety matters by appointing a senior postholder to carry out this role. They have increased the frequency of meetings of the health and safety committee and appointed a governor with expertise in the construction industry to this committee. All curriculum team meetings now include a mandatory agenda item on health and safety. The consequence of these actions has been that students, apprentices and staff at all levels have a much greater awareness of health and safety matters across the full range of the provision.

Managers have also reviewed and strengthened safeguarding arrangements. Staff understand how to use the electronic software, introduced in October 2017, to enable them to report safeguarding or welfare concerns to the team of designated safeguarding leads. Since its introduction, the safeguarding leads have logged and dealt with over 350 reported incidents. The large majority are relatively minor matters or 'near misses' that result in the implementation of suitable and proportionate control measures to minimise further risk. The designated safeguarding leads deal with almost all the safeguarding cases brought to their attention. The designated senior safeguarding lead has established good links with the local police, social services and mental health and welfare organisations, which enables staff to refer students and apprentices quickly when appropriate.

Priorities for improvement

■ Ensure that the high priority for health and safety and safeguarding translates into a fully established part of college culture, so that all students and apprentices remain safe.

How have managers responded to the inspection judgement that the proportion of students who achieve a good grade in GCSE mathematics and English (but especially the latter) is too low?

Leaders identify, in their post-inspection action plan, that the review of the English and mathematics strategy is central to their objective of maximising outcomes for students and meeting the condition of funding for those without at least a grade 4 or 5 (formerly grade C) in these subjects. They plan to achieve these aims by increasing the number of learning hours for these students, increasing the length of the teaching year and making new teaching appointments in these subject areas. It is too soon to comment on the impact of these plans.

The promotion and reinforcement of English and mathematical skills through the curriculum require improvement, especially in vocational lessons. Teachers do not routinely correct errors in students' spelling and grammar and they often fail to exploit naturally occurring opportunities during lessons to develop students' English and mathematical skills.

Priorities for improvement

■ Closely monitor the performance and progress of students on GCSE English and mathematics courses to improve their likelihood of their securing good grades in these subjects.

■ Encourage the promotion and reinforcement of students' English and mathematical skills by:
  – equipping teachers, especially in vocational subjects, with a suitable range of teaching and learning resources, materials and strategies

- ensuring that teachers correct spelling and grammatical errors in students' written work
- providing teachers with training and support where necessary.

What action have managers taken to ensure that the quality of teaching improves and that teachers set suitably challenging tasks and activities that engage all students and apprentices?

The senior leadership team rightly acknowledges that the overall quality of teaching and learning is not yet good and that too much teaching is of poor quality. The newly appointed quality team has begun to overhaul the observation of teaching and learning scheme, which previously focused on compliance with expectations rather than on the quality of learning. Early indications are that the revised arrangements for observing teaching and learning are having a positive impact on teaching and learning. Observers have a much clearer focus on the value of observation and associated professional dialogue with teachers as an improvement strategy rather than as a management tool to identify and manage underperformance. It is too soon to judge the full impact of this initiative.

Many of the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment identified during the inspection remain. Teachers' expectations of what students can do and achieve are much too low, especially on level 3 provision. The pace, content and degree of challenge and stretch are significantly below those expected in level 3 lessons. The standard of students' work in class is often too low for the level at which they study, as demonstrated by the quality and depth of their answers when questioned by the teacher or when completing learning activities.

Following the inspection, senior managers decided on appropriate actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They supported programme managers to identify underperforming teachers and to offer them professional development and mentor support to help them improve. As a result of this initiative, 16 full-time and two part-time teachers are on capability procedures. It is too soon to judge the full impact of the support that managers have implemented to help these teachers meet expectations.

Managers have not successfully tackled weaknesses related to students' personal development and behaviour. Attendance and punctuality in lessons are poor. Although students' behaviour in and around the college is generally good, too many fail to display a readiness to learn when they enter a learning environment. Teachers rarely challenge students who arrive late. Many arrive in class without a pen, paper, workbooks or stationery. Teachers routinely supply students, even those on level 3 courses, with a pen.

Priorities for improvement

■ Develop the support and professional training for teachers to ensure that they:

- enforce the expectations of students' behaviour, attendance and attitude to study

- raise their expectations of the standards students are capable of achieving, and set students suitably challenging work, especially at level 3.

■ Provide high-quality support and mentoring for the teachers on capability procedures to ensure that they make a rapid and positive contribution to improving students' progress, achievement and behaviour.

■ Ensure that the recently revised and strengthened observation of teaching and learning scheme identifies teachers' key strengths and areas for improvement and that managers rigorously monitor the achievement of improvement actions and targets.

What action have managers taken to ensure that all students and apprentices make at least good progress and achieve well in their studies?

Senior leaders have rightly identified a range of problems with the quality and accuracy of data held by different departments. Performance reports to governors often contain data that suggests a more positive picture of how well students and apprentices achieve and progress compared with the data on the college's data dashboard. The data on student numbers, retention and achievements produced by managers lacks validity. Senior managers correctly acknowledge that this is an area for improvement and have begun to take appropriate actions to improve the quality and accuracy of management data.

Notwithstanding the problems associated with the accuracy of data, the overall proportion of students who left their course early in 2017/18 is high and above the college's target. However, the data on in-year retention for courses such as sports studies is inaccurate and reduces managers' ability to monitor effectively the performance of these courses. Data held by programme managers for their own curriculum areas does not always match the data held by the central management information system.

Programme leaders do not have a sufficient understanding of the tracking and monitoring software to enable them and their teams to identify the progress that students make or to identify students at risk of leaving without completing their studies. Teachers do not set sufficiently challenging or clear targets to support students to improve and make good progress in achieving their expected grades.

Teachers do not give sufficiently detailed or constructive feedback on students' written work to help them reach the standards of which they are capable. Consequently, students do not improve at a rapid enough pace to meet or exceed their targets.

Leaders and managers do not have accurate or up-to-date data on the destination and progression of students and apprentices who left in 2016/17. The destination of around one quarter of apprentices and nearly half of all students on full-time programmes remains unknown.

Priorities for improvement

■ Carry out a comprehensive review of management information held across the different departments to ensure that data on student numbers and the proportion of students staying on their programmes held by curriculum managers matches that on the central management information system.

■ Ensure that performance reports produced for governors are accurate and reliable.

■ Ensure that teachers set targets for students that are realistic, achievable and challenging, so that students achieve the grades of which they are capable.

■ Ensure that programme managers understand how to make effective use of the software for tracking and monitoring students' progress so that they take actions to accelerate progress or support those at risk of falling behind or leaving early.

■ Collect and analyse progression data for students and for apprentices so that leaders and managers make informed decisions and judgements about how well they are performing in relation to leavers' destinations.

What actions have senior leaders taken to ensure that governors scrutinise performance more thoroughly and challenge the senior leadership where appropriate?

Following the inspection, governors took prompt action to appoint an experienced interim principal and quality team to make improvements. These appointments are too recent to have had an impact.

Governors have not yet received any additional training and support to develop their skills and capacity to carry out their role effectively. Consequently, the weakness identified during the inspection relating to governors' failure to challenge senior leaders sufficiently to ensure swift improvement, remains. Although plans are in place to strengthen the governing board through the appointment of new members, it is too soon to comment on their impact or effectiveness.

Priorities for improvement

■ Ensure that governors receive training and support to help them carry out their role more effectively, particularly in relation to holding senior leaders and managers to account for their performance.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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