

The Buckinghamshire College Group

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Buckinghamshire College Group was formed in October 2017 from the merger between Aylesbury College and Amersham and Wycombe College. The college has campuses in Aylesbury, Amersham and High Wycombe. Amersham and Wycombe College was inspected in June 2016 and was judged to be inadequate. Aylesbury College was inspected in May 2013 and was judged to be good.

During the monitoring visit, inspectors visited the campuses at Amersham and High Wycombe. They evaluated the progress leaders and managers have made in dealing with the recommendations from the inspection of Amersham and Wycombe College.

Themes

What progress have governors and senior leaders of the merged college made to make sure that students receive high-quality education and training and achieve their qualifications?

Significant progress

The new senior leadership team of the merged college has realistic but high ambitions. They set a clear direction for the improvement of the college. They have made significant progress in improving the leadership and management of the college to create a positive culture across all campuses.

Leaders and managers have made a wide range of improvements for staff and students. They have implemented processes to monitor and improve progress and outcomes for students. As a result, a greater proportion of students achieved their qualifications in 2017/18.

Governors, leaders and managers have worked effectively since the merger to create one college group. They have effectively communicated the new strategic plan to college staff through monthly campus meetings and termly cross-campus events.

Leaders and managers have introduced new systems that give responsibility for the student experience and outcomes to middle managers. Middle managers now identify strengths and weaknesses effectively. They complete self-assessment reports and produce well-considered improvement plans. These identify what they need to improve and how they are going to achieve it.

Leaders and managers deal effectively with poor staff performance. They support teaching staff with purposeful action plans and individually planned staff development to help them improve. If teachers are not able to improve, then they leave. Leaders and managers have employed advanced practitioners linked to subject areas to coach and support teachers to bring about improvements for students.

Governors receive detailed and clear monthly reports on the performance of the college. They use these to support and challenge senior leaders to make improvements and tackle performance concerns where required.

The recently enlarged governing body has a wide range of expertise and skills and good knowledge of the local community. Governors use this effectively to work with senior leaders to make positive changes. They have high aspirations for the college and frequently visit. They fully understand the improvements senior leaders are making for students.

What progress have leaders, managers and teachers made in improving the quality of teaching learning and assessment, particularly in mathematics?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have improved the quality of teaching and learning; however, this is not yet of a consistently good quality and progress in some areas has been slow. Professional teaching standards have been developed and introduced for all teachers and curriculum managers. Leaders and managers support teachers to improve their practice, but progress so far is uneven.

Many teachers, particularly in mathematics, are new to their role and still developing their craft. Staff training activities have a clear focus on improving teachers' ability to make sure students achieve their potential. Teaching staff attend cross-campus conferences on teaching and learning and share good practice. New teachers who started in September benefited from a three-day teaching and learning induction. This focused on the college's professional standards, teaching strategies, assessment methods and feedback. The appointment of advanced practitioners shows early signs of having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

Managers and teachers monitor students' progress thoroughly. At key points in the year, managers, teachers and assessors meet to decide whether their students are on track or at risk of failing and therefore in need of additional support. They also assess students' attitudes to learning, their progress against their target grade and their career ambitions. At these meetings, advanced practitioners help curriculum managers to develop plans for improvement.

Despite managers' and teachers' actions, attendance at lessons is low. This is particularly the case for English and mathematics classes. Teachers do not emphasise sufficiently the importance of attendance in these subjects for students to develop useful skills for employment. As a result of poor attendance, despite recent improvements in qualification achievement rates, students make slow progress in these subjects.

What progress have leaders and managers made in implementing effective quality assurance processes to support teachers in improving their teaching practice?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in all curriculum programmes. They know where they need to target support and improvement initiatives when teaching practices are not in line with expectations.

Senior leaders and managers have implemented a challenging quality improvement plan that focuses on improving the quality of education and training that teachers receive.

Leaders and managers have improved their lesson observation process. Managers now use clear evaluative judgements on strengths and weaknesses and identify teachers who need further support. Leaders and managers develop and review intensive coaching plans for teachers whose lessons have several 'requires improvement' indicators. The observation team has completed many more observations this academic year than in previous years to facilitate rapid improvement.

Leaders and managers review the standards of teaching in their curriculum areas and identify areas for improvement. Governors are actively involved in the reviews, which further develops their understanding of effective classroom practice. Leaders and managers use data from the observations of teaching and learning effectively. They collate and analyse the information thoroughly.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the curriculum offer for adult students to meet the needs of local employers and communities?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have put in place a well-considered curriculum that meets local and regional needs. They work effectively and closely with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs).

Managers and staff work positively with employers to increase the number of apprenticeships and adult opportunities in line with regional, national and local priorities. They align provision well to the needs of employers and local industries. Courses cover a wide range of sector areas, principally in the creative industries, construction, care, and leadership and management. Key strategic partners include Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Pinewood Studios and construction contractors.

Leaders and managers have secured the training contract for a large infrastructure group. This will result in over 400 opportunities for local adults to train or re-train in construction next year, with the project expected to continue over an eight-year

period. This training will also provide individuals with a good range of transferable construction skills that they could potentially use in the large volume of house-building locally and for the planned expansion of major infrastructure developments in the region.

Leaders and managers take account of LEP priorities and projected occupational changes in Buckinghamshire to plan their curriculum. They have a good working relationship with Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, for which they train healthcare and administrative staff. This work is thoughtfully planned and completed around shift patterns. Students on access to higher education programmes benefit from the opportunity to complete meaningful and useful work experience in the care trust linked to their career aspirations.

Students, including adults, benefit from opportunities to participate in courses in video special effects and animation. These have been designed to fill a skills gap identified by a local international film studio. Leaders and managers work collaboratively with the international film studio staff. As a result of this link, younger students studying at the college benefit from industry experts teaching them and expanding their knowledge and career opportunities.

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