

Epping Forest College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130677

Name of lead inspector: Matt Vaughan, SHMI

Inspection date(s): 14 November 2017

Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Borders Lane
Loughton
Essex
IG10 3SA

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the third re-inspection monitoring visit to Epping Forest following publication of the inspection report on 6 January 2017, when inspectors judged the provider to be inadequate for overall effectiveness, all key judgements and all provision types. The focus of this third visit, around six months after the second, was to judge, against the themes previously agreed, the progress that leaders, governors and managers have made to improve the provision.

Themes

What actions have been taken to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements for all groups of learners are effective? **Significant progress**

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders have maintained effective safeguarding arrangements. They have implemented all of their planned actions to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements for all groups of learners are effective. An appointment was made to the full-time post of 'head of learner support services and designated safeguarding officer' in May 2017. A director of learning acts as deputy designated safeguarding officer. These postholders and a team of staff who serve as safeguarding coordinators completed appropriate safeguarding training at level 3 in the summer of 2017.

Leaders continue to work productively with the Essex and Metropolitan police forces, Essex County Council and London Borough of Redbridge local authority social care departments. The designated safeguarding officer is now a member of the Essex schools safeguarding forum. Further work has been undertaken to ensure that safeguarding policies, procedures and training are robust. Risk assessments are in place for vulnerable groups of learners, including the 22 learners who attend the college and who are aged 14 to 16. A specific risk assessment on hazardous substance attacks has been refreshed following police advice.

Further training for governors and staff, including assessors and support staff, on the 'Prevent' duty and the importance of British values took place in the autumn term and more is planned. The learner induction and tutorial plans include a revised focus on safeguarding and feature new activities to promote learners' understanding of the dangers of extremism further.

What actions have been taken to improve swiftly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment? **Insufficient progress**

Leaders have continued to prioritise actions to strengthen teaching, learning and assessment. Since the last monitoring visit, a broad range of short and substantial training courses and events for teachers, assessors and support staff have taken place that promote methods to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders

have established initiatives such as the 'bring and brag' and 'teach meet' sessions that are designed to inspire teachers to improve their practice. Leaders and managers have also implemented a series of informal learning opportunities to entice and motivate teachers to discuss and share good practice. This includes the launch of the new 'learning, teaching and assessment café', which offers informal drop-in, one-to-one and group support provided by learning and teaching coaches. The peer excellence forum continues to facilitate the sharing of good practice. This includes the promotion of supported experiments to improve teaching in the classroom and regular podcasts uploaded on the college's intranet. Leaders have recently recruited an additional part-time post for a teaching and learning coach. Leaders have relaunched the 'minimum expectations' for all teachers in order to raise standards of practice.

A greater proportion of teaching, learning and assessment is effective than in previous years. Leaders' value added data on the progress that learners studying at level 3 made in 2016/17 indicates a marked improvement from a very low base on both A-level and vocational courses. However, too much teaching, learning and assessment is weak, with the result that too many learners do not make the progress of which they are capable. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous re-inspection monitoring visit remain. These include the concern that not enough teachers provide learning that meets the needs and abilities of their learners. Too often, teachers do not take into account the starting points of their learners to ensure that they set them demanding tasks and activities that challenge them to excel. In lessons, too many learners are left to become bored when they have completed tasks that they have found too easy. Not enough teachers use questioning techniques to probe and extend learners' thinking, understanding and application. Too many teachers do not check that all learners have understood fully all the aspects of a topic before moving on to another.

Some teachers' presentations, resources and materials contain spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Across the subjects, too many teachers do not provide sufficient opportunity for learners to improve their writing skills. Much teaching of mathematics does not motivate learners or challenge them to grasp key concepts and problem-solve effectively. Too many teachers of English do not provide learning that promotes relevance to learners' vocational subjects and their industry-specific career aspirations. As a consequence, some learners lose interest and fail to make good progress. In lessons, too many teachers do not utilise their learning support assistants to make sure that targeted learners make good progress. On too many occasions, support staff provide answers to learners or disrupt their concentration when working on tasks.

An increasing proportion of teachers, but still not enough, provide learning that is tailored specifically to meet the needs of their learners and enables them to accelerate their progress. They set tasks, activities and homework that interest and challenge learners to excel. These teachers deploy a broad range of methods to assess learners' understanding and application of both practical skills and relevant theory. They dedicate time to ensure that learners who are struggling are able to catch up and make good progress while others work on demanding extension tasks. These teachers make effective use of peer assessment techniques to help advance

learners' knowledge and skills. They make sure that learners' work outside of lessons is assessed thoroughly and used to augment learning. For example, a teacher successfully advanced sports learners' understanding of physiology by enabling them to demonstrate pictorially the work of myosin filaments in muscle cells. They then critiqued effectively each other's homework on the inter-relation between the body's respiratory and circulatory systems.

What actions have been taken to ensure that the observation of teachers' practice is strengthened to drive improvements in teaching, learning and assessment?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders have strengthened the formal process for the observation of teaching and learning. Observations of teachers' practice continue to be conducted very frequently and the majority place emphasis on the impact of teaching and learning on learners' progress. However, too few focus sufficiently on the standards of learners' work and not enough take into consideration the trends of low attendance. Most teachers whose practice is judged at graded observations to be less than good receive appropriate support from their managers and learning and teaching coaches. The concerns raised at the previous re-inspection monitoring visit surrounding the post-observation action planning process have mostly been rectified. The majority of actions are now monitored and evaluated effectively within agreed timescales for completion. However, a minority of plans feature ambiguous actions that lack the specificity required to help teachers improve their practice swiftly.

Leaders and managers now risk assess and monitor the findings of frequent general and themed 'learning walks' of lessons in order to ensure that identified weaknesses have improvement actions to be completed within agreed timescales. Leaders and managers continue to make sure that judgements secured through learning walks and formal observations inform staff training opportunities. These include informal drop-in and one-to-one support sessions provided by learning and teaching coaches. Managers have plans in place to ensure that all assessors' practice is observed. On joint observation activity during the re-inspection, the college's observers' findings mirrored closely those of inspectors. However, at times, they paid insufficient attention to learners' progress and seldom assessed the effectiveness of learning support assistants.

What actions have been taken to ensure that learners' attendance, punctuality and behaviour are good?

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers continue to monitor routinely learners' and apprentices' attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Leaders and managers have implemented a monthly incentive scheme to promote the value of good attendance to learners. Learners with 100% attendance are rewarded with a voucher for a free drink and their names placed in a draw each month for a prize of an e-tablet or paid public transport travel. In response to the fiscal pressures facing the college, leaders have

ended the posts of the five attendance monitors and placed accountability for attendance and punctuality with the managers and staff of each curriculum area. Learners who attend do so punctually. However, attendance was low in too many lessons during the re-inspection. Learners' attendance at English and mathematics lessons was particularly low. Leaders' data indicates that the overall attendance for the 2016/17 year was not good enough, with nearly a fifth of all learners regularly not attending. At the time of the re-inspection monitoring visit, overall cumulative attendance is already at a low level. Fewer than three-quarters of learners regularly attend their English and mathematics lessons. The levels of attendance are poor.

In all shared spaces and in most lessons, learners' behaviour during the re-inspection was impeccable. However, a few teachers do not deal effectively with learners in a few lessons who present low-level disruptive behaviour such as answering their mobile phones or distracting their peers. Leaders have ensured that staff working with learners on foundation courses have conducted behaviour management training. The induction process for learners now includes a greater emphasis on rights, responsibilities and the importance of good behaviour. Leaders and managers continue to promote assiduously the requirement that all learners wear standard identity lanyards. Learners must also adhere to a dress code that prohibits the wearing of inappropriate hoods and hats. Security staff challenge learners on these issues sensitively and appropriately.

What actions have been taken to ensure that the progress of learners and apprentices is monitored rigorously and governors, leaders and managers understand accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the provision? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders continue to make sure that all teachers record and monitor their learners' and apprentices' progress on the college's electronic monitoring system. Information on the progress, achievement, retention and attendance of learners and apprentices is shared regularly through 'dashboard' formats at meetings at all levels involving governors and all staff across the college. Most teachers' monitoring of learners' and apprentices' progress against initial and subsequent aspirational targets is appropriate. However, a minority of records of learners' targets are inaccurate and/or incoherent. Leaders are further improving the electronic monitoring system in order to enable teachers to record effectively their feedback on assignments and course work. Teachers' updates on some learners' development lack the required specificity to enable managers to understand their progress. Consequently, this impedes governors', leaders' and managers' ability to understand the impact of provision and the overall progress that learners are making. Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, the quality of information provided by leaders to governors has continued to improve. Governors are fully cognisant of some of the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision. However, governors do not establish a permanent record of accountable actions to ensure that they provide robust challenge to leaders to improve teaching, learning and assessment.

Too many teachers continue to fail to set demanding targets that challenge their learners to make good progress. Too many learners are not aware sufficiently of

their targets or what progress they have made and what they must improve to excel in their studies.

What actions have been taken to ensure that leaders and managers work effectively with the local enterprise partnership, employers and community organisations to ensure that the range and content of all provision is aligned to local and regional priorities?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous re-inspection monitoring visit, leaders have appointed to the permanent full-time post of 'Head of Enterprise and Innovation'. The postholder, in post since July 2017, is now leading on engagement with employers, local community organisations and the local enterprise partnership. The principal is now chairing the 'One Epping Forest' employment and skills board. Leaders have now branded the business development unit 'Forest Biz' in order to raise the profile of the college's work and improve partnership working with employers, the local chamber of commerce, Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council. A series of presentations at employer forums and 'taster' sessions for employers held at the college have taken place. A series of bids and tenders for full-cost work with national and local employers is in progress.

In order to develop the college's curriculum offer to meet construction employers' needs, leaders and governors have increased the range and availability of construction courses. This includes more provision for adult learners to study on a part-time basis. Leaders and governors have terminated the college's motor vehicle provision and reduced the breadth of information and communication technology courses available to local people.

Leaders are yet to work productively in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and provide opportunities for local unemployed people to train and secure employment.

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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