

Bolton College

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

Unique reference number:	130495
Name of lead inspector:	Helen Whelan, His Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	13 and 14 November 2024
Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Deane Road Bolton Lancashire BL3 5BG

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Bolton College was inspected on 28 November to 1 December 2023. 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.

Bolton College is a large general further education college based in Bolton, Greater Manchester. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 2,662 students aged 16 to 18 years on education programmes for young people. Students follow a range of vocational courses in most subject areas, from entry level to level 3. There were 3,585 adult students studying a range of vocational courses at the town centre campus and at four community venues. Around a third of adult students were enrolled on English for speakers of other languages. Community learning provision consists of courses in community interpreting, family learning, employability and life skills. Adults at the town centre campus study courses in access to higher education and courses in the vocational areas such as health and social care, education and early years.

There were 591 apprentices studying across a range of apprenticeship standards from levels 2 to 4. Almost all apprentices study at levels 2 and 3, with the highest enrolments in installation and maintenance electrician, plumbing and domestic heating technician and carpentry and joinery. The college received high needs funding for 178 students. These students study a range of vocational courses at the college.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in stabilising teaching teams where vacant posts and staff absence are impacting negatively on the quality of education and ensuring that staff are supported effectively to manage their workload? **Reasonable progress**

Although leaders still find it challenging to recruit to specialist teaching posts, they have managed to fill most teaching vacancies. Since the previous inspection, leaders have appointed around 50 teachers and several curriculum managers. They have stabilised curriculum teams in key areas such as engineering, health and social care and English and mathematics. Leaders have taken a well-considered decision to pause recruitment to courses if they are unable to recruit specialist teachers. This

includes the T level in design, surveying and planning for construction and higher technical qualifications in computing and electrical apprenticeships.

Relatively few teachers are absent from work. Leaders undertake appropriate welfare calls, return to work interviews, and make reasonable adjustments to support teachers. In addition, leaders have agreed a reasonable amount of time that teachers are asked to cover for absent colleagues.

Leaders continue to work hard to support teachers. Through consultation with staff, they have revised the remote working and stress management policy and ensure that managers consistently apply this. Leaders also consult with staff to find out about any concerns that they may have and work to resolve these. This includes what teachers feel could be done to manage their workload.

Leaders have streamlined the administrative processes that teachers need to complete. Teachers particularly appreciate leaders' investment in an artificial intelligence tool to help them plan their lessons and develop resources. Leaders have introduced protected time each week, so that teachers can attend meetings, receive training and share effective teaching practice. Staff attend various development sessions to support their welfare. This includes sessions on meditation, financial well-being and a menopause café. Teachers report favourably on these improvements. They are now better equipped to manage their workload and enjoy being part of more stable teams. This helps them to prioritise their teaching and assessment of their learners.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that staff are trained to teach all aspects of the curriculum, particularly in higher level and specialist topics? Reasonable progress

Leaders have carefully reviewed teachers' qualifications to ensure that they are appropriate for the courses they teach. They take care to update teachers' skills in a more systematic way so that they are well prepared to meet the requirements of new curriculums. For example, teachers have developed the knowledge and skills they need to meet the demands of T levels. If required, teachers undertake higher level qualifications, such as master's degrees, through the college's partnership with a local university.

Teachers benefit from effective links with industry that allow them to update their knowledge and skills so that they can teach higher level and specialist topics. Engineering teachers work with a combined missile and defence company. They explore the manufacturing process of missile heads and use this in their teaching. In plumbing, teachers receive training in low carbon technologies. Previously, teachers had a limited knowledge of green technologies, and this impacted on their ability to provide the new low carbon heating technical apprenticeship which employers wanted. Teachers are now skilled and knowledgeable about heat pumps and low carbon technology because of their training.

Leaders support teachers to maintain their dual professionalism. Teachers in health still work in health and social care settings, and teachers in art and design are involved in their specialist sectors. This supports teachers to maintain their subject currency and keep abreast of the latest technological developments in their industry.

Leaders have recently introduced a helpful process to record and monitor teachers' professional development, including their industrial updating. However, it is too early to determine whether this will provide the most suitable method to capture any gaps in staff industrial updating and ensure that training is sufficiently well planned.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in improving the quality of teaching and learning in classroom and workshop sessions, particularly in education programmes for young people and GCSE English and mathematics? Reasonable progress

Most teachers use effective strategies to help students develop new knowledge and skills. They plan engaging activities to ensure that students participate in lessons. In GCSE mathematics, students work in pairs to match fractions and percentages. This helps students to develop their understanding of key mathematical concepts and solve problems. In GCSE English, teachers carefully devise activities to develop students' understanding of how to structure their evaluations of texts.

Most teachers use questioning effectively to check students' understanding of new concepts. In level 3 engineering, teachers ask probing questions to get students to extend their answers and consider how manufacturers can control costs. Teachers give students supportive feedback and encourage them to give examples and develop their answers. In a few sessions, teachers do not check learning thoroughly enough before moving on to the next topic. Students are therefore unable to consolidate their learning.

Leaders provide a range of professional development activities to help teachers improve and develop their practice. They allocate time each week for training and provide a mentoring programme for those staff new to the college. Leaders network with other colleges in the region to research ways to improve attainment in mathematics. English teachers work with their awarding organisation to consider how they can improve the sequencing the curriculum.

Leaders undertake a range of quality assurance activities to review the standard of teaching. These include visits to lessons, reviews of teachers' assessment practices and focus groups with students and teachers. They respond promptly to any concerns they have about the quality of teaching and provide further training or support for teachers.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that teachers take account of Reasonable progress

the education, health and care (EHC) plan targets for students with high needs when planning their teaching?

Leaders have streamlined the information they provide to teachers about students' EHC plan targets. They provide accessible, user-friendly guidance about the strategies that teachers should use to adapt their teaching to meet students' specific needs, for example the need to use simplified language, allow students extra time to process information or provide students with frequent feedback on the progress they make. Most teachers take account of these targets when they plan their teaching, and they work productively with learning support staff. However, not all teachers use the information to adapt their teaching during lessons to respond swiftly enough to students' needs.

Most teachers set students with high needs appropriate targets based on their EHC plan targets and their initial assessment results. However, at times, these are too generic and not specific enough to meet the needs of individual students. Therefore, teachers do not consistently support students to make swift progress.

Leaders have restructured and redefined roles within the additional learning support (ALS) department. They have recruited staff to new positions of transition and progression advisers (TPAs). TPAs are linked to each curriculum area to forge links between ALS staff and teachers. TPAs attend curriculum meetings and work closely with teachers to help them to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of students with high needs. And although these are new posts, TPAs are having a positive impact on the quality of support students with high needs receive.

Leaders fully recognise the concerns raised at the previous inspection. They are aware that too many students with high needs were on low level courses, even if they had the qualifications to study higher-level courses. Leaders now look carefully at the support needs of students and help them to access more ambitious curriculums. They prioritise helping students to develop the independence they need to prepare them for their next stage of education, training or employment.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in increasing attendance, especially for 16-to 18-year-old students studying GCSE English and mathematics? Reasonable progress

Leaders have made several key changes to how they monitor students' attendance and how they work with managers, teachers and support staff to increase attendance. Most significantly, leaders have appointed a team of attendance officers to support curriculum teams in swiftly contacting students who are missing from lessons. They have put in place fortnightly meetings with heads of curriculum and attendance officers to review attendance and plan improvement strategies. Vocational teachers attend English and mathematics lessons to help teachers to monitor students' attendance in their GCSE lessons.

Leaders have put clear processes in place to help students to re-engage in their learning. Most teachers make use of the attendance monitoring process. They mark registers in a timely manner so attendance officers can quickly contact missing students. However, in a few cases, teachers do not complete registers within the agreed timeframe in order to allow attendance officers to complete this task quickly enough.

Leaders have introduced incentives to improve students' attendance. Students with high and improving attendance are entered into a draw for vouchers for an online marketplace. Leaders ensure that students meet key stakeholders and employers early in their course to help to motivate them and raise their aspirations.

Leaders' strategies have resulted in a positive increase in the attendance of 16-to 18-year-old students on vocational courses and GCSE English and mathematics. However, leaders recognise that attendance is still too low, and this continues to be a key priority to improve. Too many students arrive late to sessions. Most teachers challenge students' lateness appropriately and quickly involve students in lessons.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024