Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

of

The Provision and Outcomes for the Essential Skills

in

South Eastern Regional College

May 2012

FOLLOW-UP INSPECTION OF THE PROVISION AND OUTCOMES FOR THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

The original evaluation in November 2010 of the provision and outcomes for the essential skills highlighted a number of strengths. These included: the good or better quality of the teaching and learning in the majority of the lessons observed; the good leadership and management of the essential skill of information and communication technology (ICT); and, the good initial assessment processes.

The evaluation identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the lack of a clear strategy for the provision of the essential skills across the College;

- the inadequate leadership and management of the essential skills of literacy and numeracy; and

- the inadequate arrangements for the quality assurance of the essential skills.

The inspection of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI provision in the College in February/March 2011 highlighted a number of strengths in the provision for the essential skills, including the: very good quality of the teaching and learning; good use of appropriate vocational and/or personal contexts to engage and motivate the trainees and apprentices; good initial assessment processes to identify the trainees' and apprentices' strengths and weaknesses; good success rates in literacy and numeracy; high proportion of the Programme-Led Apprentices targeting the essential skill of literacy and numeracy beyond the minimum requirement of their framework; and, recent strategies implemented by senior management to improve the provision and to re-engage trainees and apprentices in essential skills classes.

The inspection identified the need for improvement in the following key areas:

- the poor levels of attendance at essential skills classes, in particular the ICT classes;

- the inconsistent monitoring of progress by the tutors through the use of the group learning plans, and by the Training Support Officers through the review process; and

- the arrangements to ensure all apprentices and trainees have the appropriate opportunities to achieve the essential skills required for their framework.

Since the original evaluation (2010) of the provision and outcomes for the essential skills, and the inspection of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI provision (2011), the South Eastern Regional College has taken the following actions to address the areas for improvement:

- the implementation of an improved strategy for the provision of the essential skills across the College;

- the establishment of an essential skills working group to address areas of concern, promote improvements, and to enhance the quality of communication regarding the essential skills in the College;

- the implementation of revised arrangements for the enrolment and timetabling of students to their essential skills classes;

- the introduction and further refinement of effective quality improvement initiatives, including regular case conferences and additional provision, to re-engage students and improve key performance indicators such as attendance, retention and achievement rates in the essential skills;

- the clear arrangements for the monitoring of the composition of the essential skills classes, including the class size, the range of levels and the rate of attendance;

- the development of an innovative electronic Personal Training Plan (e-PTP) database for the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes, based upon high levels of consultation with key staff, to enhance target-setting, and the tracking and monitoring of student progression; and

- the ongoing and regular consultation with the essential skills staff as an integral part of the management of change and the College's quality improvement agenda.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original evaluation and the inspection of the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI provision:

- the high priority afforded by the senior management to improving the essential skills provision underpinned by a significant investment in resourcing the improvement initiatives;

- the very good quality of the leadership and management of the essential skills as demonstrated by the senior management team;

- the implementation of an improved strategy for the provision of the essential skills across the College, which is communicated effectively to, and is understood by, staff;

- the much better arrangements for the enrolment and timetabling of students to the essential skills classes and the effective use of data to monitor and manage effectively the composition of the classes;

- the implementation of a range of appropriate quality improvement initiatives, in particular, the highly effective and inclusive case conferencing process which involves staff and senior management, and leads to appropriate actions to support those students identified as being at risk, at an early stage;

- the development of an innovative e-PTP database for the Training for Success and the ApprenticeshipsNI programmes which is used well to inform and enhance the case conferencing process;

- the revised arrangements for the reviewing and tracking of the progress of the trainees on the Skills for Work 156 week and the Skills for Your Life strands of the Training for Success provision;

- the improved links between SERC Extra and the work of the Training Support Officers in ensuring that the outcomes of support interventions are monitored;

- the improved quality of the teaching and learning which was good or better in 83% of the lessons observed; and

- the hard and effective work of the quality improvement managers in sustaining and embedding the agenda for improvement at all levels within the essential skills provision.

The following areas require further development:

- the further embedding of more consistently high quality teaching and learning across the full range of the provision, including the more extensive use of the College's virtual learning environment to enhance teaching and learning in the essential skills;

- the ongoing review of the variation in attendance and achievement across the campuses, and in particular the achievement rate in numeracy at level 1; and

- the further consolidation and embedding by the Heads of School of the good progress made since the original evaluation and subsequent inspection, and the continued monitoring of this process by the senior management.

CONCLUSION

In the essential skills, the quality of the provision in South Eastern Regional College is now good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational provision.

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