

Petroc

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

Unique reference number:	130646
Name of lead inspector:	Clifford Shaw, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Old Sticklepath Hill Barnstaple Devon EX31 2BQ

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Petroc was inspected in October 2024. 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.

Petroc is a general further education college with two campuses, one in Barnstaple and one in Tiverton. The college provides a range of academic, vocational and technical courses and apprenticeships from pre-entry level to level 4, and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the monitoring visit, around 2298 learners aged 16 to 18, 699 adult learners and 519 apprentices were studying at the college. There were around 478 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and in receipt of high needs funding, studying on academic or vocational programmes.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to increase the proportion of young learners, including those with high needs, who stay until the end of the course and achieve their qualifications

Significant progress

Following the previous inspection leaders' actions have been highly effective in increasing the proportion of young learners, including those with high needs, who achieve their qualifications at Petroc. Over four-fifths of learners who study education programmes for young people now gain their qualifications compared to less than three-quarters in the previous academic year. The large majority of learners with high needs now achieve their qualifications compared to less than three-quarters in the previous academic year.

Leaders ensure that staff receive accurate and timely information about the progress learners are making with their studies. Staff use this information to take swift action to intervene and help learners to improve their attendance and to keep up with their studies. Staff quickly identify the key risks which may impede learners' ability to attend college or to study well. For example, teachers provide catch-up lessons for those learners who have been absent or require extra study time to understand topics better. Staff work closely and effectively with parents, carers and external agencies to put in place well-judged strategies to support learners. For example,

learners who have limited access to public transport or exceptionally long journeys to college receive adapted lesson timetables so that they do not miss learning.

Governors receive detailed reports from leaders on the progress learners are making on their courses. They monitor the impact of leaders' actions to improve outcomes for learners against a comprehensive set of key performance indicators.

Consequently, governors are well informed and have a keen understanding of the college's strengths, weaknesses and the pace of improvement. Governors receive useful progress reports about those curriculum areas where weaknesses in teaching or low attendance have been identified. They use this information to challenge leaders rigorously to gain assurance about the impact of improvement actions.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that young learners and high needs learners on courses specially designed for them get the work experience, careers information and guidance they need to make informed choices.	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection leaders have taken rapid action to ensure that the very large majority of young learners, including those learners with high needs, receive high quality work experience. Leaders have put in place a range of ambitious and impactful initiatives to increase the number of employers who provide work experience opportunities. Consequently, the range of placements available to learners has increased significantly, because of this, and staff have more opportunities to match learners to placements that develop their skills and interests. For example, learners studying A-level subjects in law and politics work in local parliamentary offices where they learn about lobbying and how local civic decisions are made by attending regional council meetings.

Leaders have taken substantial steps to increase and improve the work-experience placements available to learners with high needs and those with SEND. They ensure that learners are introduced into work placement settings gradually. For example, learners have taster visits and can shadow employees so they can familiarise themselves with their new surroundings. Staff listen carefully to learners to understand their personal interests and use this information well to place learners in settings they are excited about. For example, learners with a passion for computer games gain retail experience in gaming and computer repair shops.

Leaders have taken action to ensure that young learners receive high quality careers education information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). Leaders have put in place a careers lead for learners with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) to ensure that the advice and guidance they receive is pertinent to their needs and personal goals. Careers advisors use a comprehensive range of high-quality online resources to underpin the independent CEIAG they provide to learners. They customise and

recommend the resources for learners to access based on their aspirations and career goals so they can practise and develop essential skills, such as, job or higher education applications and effective job searching.

What progress have leaders made to improve teaching strategies to help young learners know and remember more in mathematics	Significant progress
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Leaders' strategic focus on training for teachers has resulted in a rapid improvement in the quality of mathematics teaching. Consequently, young learners find the subject enjoyable and their attendance at mathematics lessons has improved. Since the previous inspection a greater proportion of young learners now gain the higher grades for their GCSE mathematics qualification or achieve a functional skill.

Teachers assess learners' abilities in mathematics accurately at the start of their course. They use this information purposefully to identify what learners already know and what they need to improve. They use their experience and analyses of the common weaknesses in learners' mathematical abilities well to plan the order in which they study different skills. For example, teachers of functional skills frontload the teaching of algebra so that learners can become more knowledgeable and confident in this first. Teachers use very effective techniques to help learners to recall what they have been taught. They are adept at relating mathematical knowledge to a range of vocational and work-related contexts to enhance the relevance of the subject for learners. They use prompts and praise skilfully to encourage and support learners so that they gain in confidence and understand increasingly complex mathematical concepts.

Leaders have high expectations that managers and teachers consistently promote the importance of mathematics to learners. Leaders foster positive attitudes towards mathematics by, for example, insisting that mathematics is a standing item on agendas for all faculty management and curriculum meetings. Managers monitor learners' attendance at mathematics lessons rigorously. They use the information they receive about learners' attendance to instigate swift follow up actions to support learners to improve their attendance.

What progress have leaders made to ensure that young learners receive personal development so that they have an in-depth knowledge of subjects such as healthy eating, fundamental British values and how to protect themselves from extremist views.	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection leaders have acted decisively to ensure that young learners receive purposeful and well-structured teaching, so they know more about important topics such as healthy eating, British values and how to keep safe from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders have established a vibrant personal development programme which is largely taught through tutorials. They make good use of feedback from staff and learners to continuously review and refresh what learners are taught so that tutorials reflect issues which affect their personal lives, such as, how to use artificial intelligence safely and how to manage their money.

Leaders ensure that curriculum staff contribute actively to the college's tutorial programme. Teachers of A-level subjects teach bite-sized sessions on topics they are passionate about such as sustainability, astronomy and computing. Teachers in the creative industries teach their learners about topics such as self-employment, dress codes for different workplaces and opportunities to collaborate and learn new skills on projects such as performing arts productions. Leaders have substantially expanded the programme of sessions delivered by external experts. As a result, learners tailor the sessions they attend to match their personal interests such as, for example, talks by the armed services, universities and authors. Learners learn how to maintain their health and wellbeing through expert talks about personal resilience, the therapeutic benefits of pets and how to maintain positive sexual health.

Leaders ensure that staff receive training on how to ensure that tutorials are well-taught and maintain learners' interest. Sessions are reviewed on a weekly basis to revise and update content so that tutorials remain relevant to learners by reflecting current topical themes. Consequently, learners' attendance at tutorials has risen. Most learners enjoy tutorials and value the wider knowledge they gain by attending.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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