

Tech City College

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Peter Nelson, HMI

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the second re-inspection monitoring visit to Tech City College, following publication of the inspection report on 13 April 2016 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Tech City College joined Aspirations Academies Trust in September 2015. At that time, the chief executive of the trust, along with the newly appointed principal and governing body, took over the leadership of the college.

Students are on level 3 study programmes predominantly focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). At the time of this re-inspection monitoring visit, there were a total of around 80 students at the academy across the Years 12 and 13 year-groups.

The purpose of this visit was to establish the progress that governors, senior leaders, managers and staff have made to raise the quality of provision since the first re-inspection monitoring visit, which took place in June 2016.

Themes

Provide training for teachers so that they improve their teaching, marking and feedback to students and are helped to assess accurately the progress that students make

Reasonable progress

The college has benefited significantly from membership of the Aspirations Trust. The partnership is providing to managers substantial support and access to proven systems, procedures and expertise, in particular to help them in developing and improving the skills of teachers. All staff have a real determination and commitment to continue improving and developing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that they support students to achieve their potential.

Leaders conduct regular lesson observations to identify best practice and areas for development among the staff team. They recognise and celebrate the improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that have taken place to date, and acknowledge that further improvements are required.

The principal and other managers also undertake regular learning walks to monitor teachers' development and to provide feedback and guidance where necessary. Each member of staff has regular meetings with the principal to review their students' progress against key targets. This helps to ensure that staff are clear about the expectations that managers are placing on them and also maintains a focus on the key academic success criteria.

Leaders have put in place thorough individual support and mentoring for teachers, who have the opportunity to work with skilled teaching practitioners from across the

trust. These mentors respond in particular to any areas for development identified through observation and learning walks. In addition, there is a programme of regular staff development activities which provides opportunities for all staff from across the different institutions of the trust to share their ideas and further develop their skills.

The principal has also created weekly opportunities at staff meetings to share teachers' innovations and good practice with their colleagues. The principal expects all staff to participate in the scheme and they have found it to be particularly effective in raising standards, as well as engaging and motivating teachers.

Priorities for improvement

- Maintain the focus on strategies and initiatives to continue raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that managers continue to review the impact of this training and use the feedback from lesson observations and learning walks to identify ongoing improvement strategies in those areas and with those people where they will have maximum impact.
- Ensure that lesson-observation and quality-review processes for teaching, learning and assessment remain sharply focused and objective.

Develop strategies to improve poor attendance Significant progress

Leaders and managers have established very high expectations for student attendance and punctuality. They have put in place thorough systems and procedures to monitor attendance and punctuality and to follow up any student who continues not to meet these expectations. As a result, attendance rates have improved significantly since the last monitoring visit and are around 95%.

Staff monitor attendance closely and challenge lateness or absence from lessons. Where necessary, they involve parents in any actions to help maximise attendance.

Staff and managers routinely discuss attendance and punctuality, and receive timely data to help them review these factors accurately. Teachers respond swiftly to student absences and take appropriate action to provide either intervention or support to ensure that students regularly attend classes.

All staff take sanctions against any students whose attendance declines, and actively celebrate those students whose attendance and punctuality are exemplary. Students clearly understand the link between good attendance and high achievement.

Priorities for improvement

- Maintain the high expectations associated with students' attendance and punctuality.

Provide work experience aligned to students' courses and aspirations

Significant progress

Leaders have successfully fostered strong links with a broad range of large- and small-scale employers and businesses. They have used these contacts very successfully to develop an extensive range of work experience and work-related activities, which are now available to students.

In particular, leaders have adopted an innovative approach to using vacant areas of the college premises by accommodating an organisation that provides facilities and support for business start-up and innovation companies at reduced rates. Part of the agreement for the new businesses is that they provide work experience opportunities to students. Students spend time with the business entrepreneurs, working on a broad range of initiatives including technology, robotics, construction and engineering projects. In addition, representatives from these and other companies visit the college regularly to work with students to raise their awareness of other business, innovation and career opportunities.

The college has also developed links with NASA in the USA, providing opportunity for a small group of students to visit their facilities each year.

Managers also run the 'aspirations employability portfolio' initiative. This provides all Year 12 students with the opportunity to undertake three 10-week projects, working with employers to complete a commercial-style brief. For example, a group of students are currently taking part in a regional competition to submit proposals for the redesign of the nearby Old Street roundabout. The brief includes a range of parameters, including a requirement to develop relaxation areas for the public, improve the flow of traffic and consider how to make the junction safer for cyclists.

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to provide a broad range of opportunities for students, to enable them to access high-quality work experience.

Provide non-qualification and enrichment activities, including the development of challenging and interesting work for students to do outside lessons

Significant progress

Leaders have programmed an extensive range of activities for students, which add significant value to the quality of the education and student experience at the college. These activities include a range of health and well-being initiatives, such as keep fit and other sports activities, a food technology society and sessions on sexual health. Students also have the opportunity to take part in activities which enable them to develop their aspirations, such as careers and higher education fairs. In addition, staff arrange a programme of informal clubs such as film club, music group and electronics coding. Staff also arrange events that provide students with the opportunity to develop their social awareness through involvement in activities such as student parliament, celebration of black history month and participation in a

national conference on sustainability. Students also have the opportunity to attend workshops which focus on topics such as life skills and budgeting.

Students are able to take part in a broad range of educational and developmental trips, for example to local museums, a nearby astronomical observatory and local theatre productions. Students also have the opportunity to take part in various competitions, such as the national mathematics challenge and a young enterprise regional competition.

Managers and staff create a range of opportunities to celebrate the success of students, who value the recognition of their hard work that such events provide.

Leaders have also fostered effective links with several local organisations whose staff help to provide valuable support, mentoring and coaching to students. For example, staff from University College London and also from a local organisation called 'cultural capital' attend the college periodically and provide academic and personal support to students. They also provide guidance to students around self-image and self-esteem.

Priorities for improvement

- Maintain the extensive programme of non-qualification and enrichment activities available to students.

Provide high-quality careers advice and guidance Significant progress

Leaders and managers have developed highly effective strategies for raising students' awareness of progression opportunities on completion of their time at the college. In 2016, virtually all students who completed their courses successfully progressed to the next stage. The significant majority of these students gained places at universities, with others enrolling on apprenticeships, securing employment or taking a gap year.

Students receive frequent presentations exploring career and university options. They also undertake projects with employers, which help raise their awareness of the training and education routes they might consider. Students also attend a range of careers and higher education fairs.

Staff work closely with local organisations, including the 'Islington education services post-16 progression team' organisation and the National Careers Service, both of which provide further careers information and guidance. Students also receive advice and support on preparing CVs and personal statements, making applications for work and also to university via the UCAS scheme.

Priorities for improvement

- Maintain the focus and high level of support available to students when considering their progression options.

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