

20 August 2024

Roddy Henry
Principal and Chief Executive Officer
Newbattle Abbey College

Dear Roddy,

A team of HM Inspectors from Education Scotland visited Newbattle Abbey College in June 2024 to undertake an annual engagement visit. During our visit, we talked to learners, staff and stakeholders, and worked closely with the senior managers.

The team found the following major strengths in the college's work:

Learner progress and outcomes

The overall success rate for part-time further education (FE) learners was fourteen percentage points above national sector performance. The overall success rate for full-time FE learners was 3.8 percentage points above national sector performance. However, for full-time higher education (HE) learners, the overall success rate was one percentage point below national sector performance. The success rates for care experienced learners, learners with a declared disability and learners from the most deprived areas were well above national sector performance. The college collaborates well with Women's Aid East and Midlothian to deliver training for staff on trauma informed practice and domestic abuse. The outdoor learning spaces and therapeutic teaching approaches support learners well with meta skills such as confidence building and resilience. Teaching staff have a good focus on skills for learning, life and work which helps learners to recognise their development and achievement of meta skills.

Approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching including professional updating

Senior leaders conducted a comprehensive review of the curriculum offer to ensure that college programmes are relevant and sustainable. Curriculum teams use performance data and feedback from learners effectively to identify areas of learning and teaching practice that need improvement. Curriculum managers have aligned the core curriculum offer well with community, partnership and project work. Professional development for learning and teaching is an integral part of teaching roles. Most staff continue to be involved with their area of expertise outside of college and use this experience well to maintain up-to-date subject knowledge. Most curriculum staff use contextualised and project-based learning and teaching approaches effectively to reduce the assessment burden for learners. Learners praise the enthusiasm that teaching staff have for their subject specialism. A digital technologist is available for staff and learners to support them with their digital skills. Curriculum teams use feedback from mid-course and end-of-year reviews effectively to enhance the learner experience.

Learner Engagement

Learners have good opportunities to influence the delivery and content of programmes. Almost all learners report a positive and welcoming environment for learning and excellent relationships with college staff. Most learners describe well, the positive impact the college has on their confidence, sense of self-worth, motivation and aspirations. The Student Council is represented well on college committees and the office bearers feel their views are valued by managers and staff. College managers use a systematic approach to collate evidence from self-evaluation into action plans. Suggestions for improvement to the learner experience are passed to the Curriculum and Student Experience Committee for consideration and implementation of agreed actions. Learners report they have good opportunities to provide feedback to the college and that this influences approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Lesson delivery is flexible to meet the specific needs and challenges of individual learners. Most learners complete the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey each year and are highly satisfied with their college experience.

The following areas for improvement were identified and discussed with the senior managers:

- There is scope to enhance professional practice by using the professional standards and the evaluation of naturally occurring professional development activities.
- Some learners experience challenges with the digital technologies staff use to support learning and teaching. These issues include reliability and compatibility of technology and the level of digital skills of some staff.
- There is scope to strengthen the monitoring and reporting of actions taken as a result of learner feedback.
- The use of Class Notebook is not yet used consistently across all curriculum teams.

Main points for action

There are no main points for action.

What happens next?

We are confident that the college has made satisfactory progress and has the capacity to continue to improve. We will continue to monitor progress with regular contact through the link HM Inspector.

Ian Beach
HM Inspector