

Bishop Auckland College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Bishop Auckland College is a medium sized, general further education college. It serves the local urban and wider rural areas of south west Durham. The area has nine 11 to 16 and six 11 to 18 secondary schools. The college offers a broad vocational curriculum on its main campus covering entry level to foundation degrees. Part-time courses are offered in a number of community venues.

The area of south west Durham has a high incidence of socio-economic disadvantage. In 2008/09, the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, increased to just below average. However, literacy and numeracy skills for students joining the college remain low. Staying on rates in the area are low.

The college was last inspected in November 2007. Overall effectiveness was judged to be good, as were educational and social inclusion, capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management. Achievement and standards were satisfactory and the college was judged to have made good progress since its previous inspection. No subject areas were inspected.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the college made in developing management capabilities in critical evaluation of performance and quality improvement action planning?

**Reasonable
Progress**

The new principal, in post since April 2010 and the recently restructured senior management team have a very clear view of the changes necessary to bring about improvements in provision at the college. Clear priorities have been identified and a strategy for improvement communicated to staff. The senior management team has moved quickly to implement its strategy.

Since the last inspection, the self-assessment process has undergone considerable revision. Course team leaders and teachers are now fully involved in evaluating their courses, although some are more confident in this than others. The course review process has been strengthened through the much improved availability of accurate data and revisions to the documentation. Curriculum self-assessment reports are increasingly evaluative, although the college is aware that more work needs to be done to ensure greater consistency in the quality of these reports. Systems are in place to seek students' views and these now inform the self-assessment process systematically. The draft summary self-assessment report, based on evidence during the visit, gives an honest and realistic picture of the college's performance in 2009/10.

Links between the curriculum self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans are clear. Reports are unequivocal in identifying where improvements are needed. Actions to rectify weaknesses are specific and time bound. The rigour in monitoring action plans is much improved through the introduction of regular course performance reviews. These reviews are focused primarily on underperforming areas where more rapid improvement is needed.

Outcomes for students

What progress has the college made in improving outcomes for students? Reasonable Progress

Success rates have fluctuated since the last inspection but overall there is an upward trend. Based on college data for 2009/10, success rates on long courses have increased and are now close to, or just below, the national rates for 2008/09. The rise is due to substantial increases in pass rates, which are high at most levels for all students. Retention has either stayed at the national average or declined. For students' aged 16 to 18 on foundation courses, success rates have improved significantly since the last inspection and are high. Success rates in subject areas vary widely. For example, rates in catering and hospitality are consistently high but rates in information and communication technology are low. Success rates for the small number of minority ethnic students at the college have improved and are close to those for White British students. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did less well than their peers in 2009/10. Females on courses at all levels perform better than males, although males have achieved well in non-traditional areas such as childcare and hairdressing. Students aged 14 to 16 on college courses achieve very well.

According to college data for 2009/10, rates of completion within the planned time for apprentices have declined from the previous year. Analysis of these data confirms that much of this decline is due to the prevailing economic conditions affecting the construction industry. Success rates on Train to Gain are high.

The college has conducted a rigorous analysis of student outcomes in 2009/10 and staff at all levels are acutely aware of where performance needs to improve. Attendance and retention are key areas for improvement. Much has been done, particularly since the arrival of the new principal, to tackle these issues. Changes to course entry criteria have been implemented more consistently at enrolment. Other measures include robust attendance monitoring, more systematic use of electronic data to monitor in-year performance and a revised curriculum offer. It is too soon to judge the full impact of these strategies but early indications are that actions are beginning to bear fruit. Attendance, for example, has improved compared to a similar period last year

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning?

Reasonable Progress

In 2008/09, the college judged teaching and learning to be good. The college now judges teaching and learning to be satisfactory. The new senior management team rightly encouraged managers to consider outcomes when judging the quality of teaching and learning. In taking this into account, managers concluded that the grade 2 awarded was not supported by the college's overall success rates.

The college's acknowledgement that teaching and learning were over-graded in the previous self-assessment report was followed by changes in the management structure, development for the team of observers and a new action plan to improve the provision. The college places a very high priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning but the action plan does not take a sufficiently broad view and has placed too much emphasis on writing guidance, new checklists and expanding the scope of observations to cover assessment and use of information and learning technologies. However, the college does have an appropriate strategy for securing improvements through extensive staff development opportunities and the appointment of a senior manager to ensure that teaching and learning remain a priority. Joint observations with college observers during the visit demonstrated that the college observers have a good understanding of best classroom practice and where improvements are needed to secure high quality teaching and learning.

What progress has the college made in ensuring high quality literacy and numeracy provision to support students and enable them to stay on their courses and achieve well?

Reasonable Progress

Recent positive changes to the management structure and delivery of literacy and numeracy support have contributed to improving the arrangements for support. Prior to these changes, pastoral support, study support and the learning support assistant team were managed by three different managers. Consequently, there was no coherent plan or strategy for integrating these strands and the sharing of information and data between them was difficult. The new structure brings all aspects of support together under one manager. Students now benefit from a single integrated support plan, better communications and more efficient use of data and information on students and learning. Recent changes to the admissions policy and procedures give students a much better chance of studying at a level appropriate to their attainment on entry. Initial assessment has also been improved to give a broader view of students' attainment and potential. The new arrangements have been in place for six months and managers are judging their effectiveness on early indications of improved attendance and retention. More robust measures of the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy support will be available when final results for this cohort are available.

What progress has the college made in improving the quality of tutorials? **Reasonable progress**

Following a comprehensive review of tutorial provision, which included substantial feedback from students and staff, group tutorials have been revised completely. The college has replaced the online tutorial programme with a more traditional face-to-face group tutorial approach that integrates the Every Learner Matters themes very well. Students say that they welcome this because it provides opportunities for valuable discussions with their peers. Issues such as bullying, behaviour and e-safety have been explored fully and have resulted in vibrant student-rich displays across the college. Arrangements to quality assure the new tutorial systems are securely in place and a full evaluation will take place later in the year.

What progress has the college made in ensuring that targets in individual learning plans (ILPs) are sharply focused on helping students to achieve their potential? **Reasonable Progress**

Students benefit from recently redesigned plans that bring together many aspects of learning. Staff and learners work together to set appropriate targets that are carefully monitored through the review process. Discussions with learners confirm that they find the revised ILPs helpful in setting, monitoring and achieving their individual targets and learning goals. However, it is too early to assess the impact of the ILPs on their contribution to improving success rates.

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