

Barnfield College

Inspection Report 4 - 8 June 2007

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

Description of the provider

1. Barnfield College is a large general further education college. It has four campuses in Luton and a fifth in Bedford, together with a large number of additional learning venues in the local communities. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE grades at A* to C in the area is below the national average, and the unemployment rate is above that seen nationally.
2. The college provides further education in most vocational areas, with full-time learner numbers being highest in health and social care, engineering, computing and information and communication technology (ICT), and hairdressing and beauty therapy. In Bedford and village outreach campuses in mid-Bedfordshire, the college provides lifelong learning programmes in ICT, Skills for Life and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Barnfield College collaborates with Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Education Authority in the provision of adult and community learning (ACL). The college has six Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs). It also has a number of work-based learning programmes.
3. The college has approximately 2,800 learners aged 16-18, around 80% of whom are full-time, and 6,300 adult learners; the large majority taking part-time courses. There are around 230 work-based learners. Approximately 20% of learners are on ACL provision. The college also provides a range of vocational courses for Year 10 and Year 11 learners from local schools. The number of learners on these courses has increased significantly to around 750 in 2006/07 due to collaborative work with Campus Luton and local schools. The overall participation rate on all college courses by learners of all ages from minority ethnic groups is 25%. However, 40% of full-time learners aged 16-18 come from minority ethnic groups, reflecting the proportion in the local population.
4. The college mission statement is "To create dynamic learning situations that will enable individuals, employers and communities to achieve their personal, corporate, education and employment goals in a cost effective, innovative and inclusive environment".

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

5. The effectiveness of provision is outstanding. The achievement and standards of learners are good. The overall success rate for the college has increased by 5% since the previous inspection and was above the national average in 2005/06. Success rates are particularly high for adults, who form the majority of learners in the college, and for learners of all ages on foundation courses. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 on advanced courses have improved in recent years but were below the national averages in 2005/06. Learners make good progress and the progression to further education, higher education and employment is good.
6. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are characterised by a good range of learning activities and effective use of integrated learning technology (ILT). The lesson observation system is rigorous and accurate. The college has put in place a wide range of strategies that is leading to further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The effective use of feedback to learners to raise standards is an area for improvement.
7. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The curriculum choice is wide and varied with an excellent range of courses at all levels. Strong links with employers enhance learners' experiences by providing a good range of work experience and opportunities to broaden and enrich their knowledge and understanding effectively. The college has an excellent approach to social and educational inclusion.
8. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. The college provides excellent information and guidance for all learners. The provision for additional learning needs is highly effective. Excellent support is provided to help learners progress to further education, training or employment. The development of the economic wellbeing of learners is outstanding.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides inspirational leadership and the college has a clear strategic direction. Quality improvement is rigorous and successful. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Financial management is outstanding and governance is excellent.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

10. The college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve its provision for learners. Quality assurance arrangements are very comprehensive and highly effective in bringing about improvements. Managers know the college well and the self-assessment report for 2005/06 was accurate. Staff at all levels are very clearly focused on continuous improvement. The college's core values clearly permeate all activities. There is outstanding leadership with a clear focus on improving learners' experiences. Staff morale is very high. The college is in a strong financial position and resources are used very efficiently to improve the learning environment and the quality of provision.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

11. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. All of the key areas identified have been addressed successfully. Success rates have improved every year and retention rates for adults on level 1 courses are now well above national averages. Standards of teaching for part-time staff are much improved and the lesson observation system has been redesigned to be much more rigorous and comprehensive. The management of work-based learning has been improved. Success rates for work-based learners have increased significantly in 2006/07. The strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained or enhanced. The college has been particularly responsive to the needs of the local community that it serves and to local and national initiatives.

Key strengths

- improving and high success rates
- good progression for learners to further education, higher education or employment
- good teaching and learning
- wide range of effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning further
- highly responsive curriculum that meets the needs of all learners
- excellent approach to educational and social inclusion
- highly effective provision for additional learning needs
- outstanding advice and guidance for learners
- inspirational leadership and clear strategic direction
- outstanding financial management
- rigorous and successful quality improvement.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- low success rates for 16-18 year old learners on advanced courses
- feedback to learners that clearly indicates what they need to do to improve.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: grade 2

12. The college has accurately assessed achievement and standards to be good. The overall success rate for the college has increased by 5% since the previous inspection and was above the national average in 2005/06. Success rates have improved for learners of all ages and at all levels of the curriculum. Success rates in 2005/06 were high for adults, who form the majority of learners in the college, and similar to the national average for 16-18 year olds. Success rates were particularly high on foundation courses and for adults on advanced courses. Success rates for 16-18 year old learners on advanced courses, who make up around 15% of all learners, have improved in recent years but were below the national average in 2005/06. Success rates on adult and community learning programmes were similar to those of the college as a whole. Most learners enter the college with relatively low prior attainment and make good progress.
13. Success rates were very high for the relatively small group of 14-16 year old learners in 2005/06 and progression onto college courses for these learners was good. There is good progression for learners between levels of courses within the college. An increasing proportion of learners progress to higher education each year. Success rates for work-based learners have been recognised as an area for improvement by the college, particularly in construction and engineering. Improvements have been noted in 2006/07 and current success rates are similar to the national average. The proportion of learners on long courses who have been retained on their programmes in 2006/07 is notably higher than at a similar time in 2005/06.
14. Success rates in key skills have improved and are well above the national averages. The development of the economic wellbeing of learners is outstanding. Although the success rates for learners of minority ethnic heritage is lower than that for white British learners, data indicate that the standards they achieve are improving at a similar rate. The college has been particularly successful in improving the success rate of male learners aged 16-18 so that the difference in success rates between males and females fell from 12% in 2004/05 to 6% in 2005/06. The overall success rate for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in 2005/06 was similar to that of other learners. The average attendance rate in 2006/07 has been good at 86%. Health and safety practices are good.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

15. The quality of provision is outstanding and this agrees with the college's self-assessment. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons well, with a variety of activities and with appropriate expectations which match the diverse needs of individual learners. In many lessons, learning is enlivened by enthusiastic teachers and the effective use of integrated learning technology (ILT). The college makes good use of new technologies to share learning materials and promote good practice. Learners enjoy their lessons and the time spent in the college. Arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning have been improved and are now much more rigorous and accurate. Lesson grades are matched closely to a framework which focuses on the quality of learning as well as teaching. The profile of grades awarded shows a significant increase in the proportion of lessons graded as good or better. Key skills are well integrated in vocationally relevant activities, and learners can develop their skills further through workshops, study centres and support in lessons.
16. Assessment is carefully planned and monitored, and meets course needs. Progress reviews take place every six weeks, and the results of these are sent to parents of 16-18 year old learners. However, too often feedback is not used effectively to promote improvements. For example, in some cases targets are not sufficiently specific or measurable. In other cases, feedback is restricted to positive comments and does not help learners understand how to improve the quality of their work.
17. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The curriculum choice is wide and varied with an excellent range of courses at all levels. Progression is good, with many learners moving successfully through a number of levels. Full account is taken of the needs of learners and employers, with an excellent response to local and regional requirements. Rigorous market research and labour market information is used to inform the curriculum offer. Links with schools are excellent, with the college providing good vocational training for over 750 learners in schools and in the college.
18. Excellent links with employers enhance learners' experiences by providing a good range of work experience and opportunities to broaden and enrich their knowledge and understanding effectively. Enrichment also supports learners in making a positive contribution to the college and the local community. The college is very effective in providing bespoke training programmes to meet employers' needs, enhanced by good provision in the six CoVEs.

19. The structure of the college timetable is highly flexible and is supported by a wide variety of good online learning resources. Well structured guided learning weeks effectively linked to individual learning plans (ILPs) provide excellent opportunities for learners to succeed. The college is highly effective in enrolling under-represented groups from the community along with those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. College business support services welcome learners with difficulties and/or disabilities to work alongside them in the canteens and shops, gaining real work experience.
20. Support and guidance for learners are outstanding. Tutorials are enhanced through a particularly extensive range of staff expertise and learning materials. The college has excellent support staff who offer help and guidance to ensure that learners are given accurate and up-to-date information on numerous financial, personal and health related issues. When necessary, they refer learners to a very wide range of specialist advice organisations in both Luton and Bedford. Learners are well supported with ample funds to help with childcare and other costs.
21. The college provides excellent information and guidance for all learners, before they enrol, during their courses and when they leave a programme. All full-time and almost all part-time learners are initially assessed for literacy and numeracy skills, and where appropriate for vocational skills and motivation. Highly effective additional learning support is put into place promptly. Learners are very carefully guided through realistic progression routes to help them achieve their goals. Learners progressing from one level to another within the college can work with support teachers to develop appropriate study skills to make the transition easier. The college's good links with other careers guidance services and employers help learners make well informed career choices.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grade:

Equality of opportunity

Good: grade 2

22. Inspectors agree with the college's view that leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides inspirational leadership and is very ably supported by senior managers. The college has visionary and innovative strategies which are highly responsive to regional and national priorities. Barnfield will be the first college in the country to sponsor two local school academies. A strong desire to bring about improvements and

strive for excellence is evident throughout the college. Communication with staff and learners is excellent. The college has developed a strong culture of effective team work.

23. Quality improvement processes are rigorous and highly effective. Since the previous inspection, the college has continued to improve success rates at all levels. There are clear lines of accountability. In areas of underperformance, support has been put in place which has led to clear improvements. Management information is robust and easily accessible by staff. It is used successfully to monitor performance and improve success rates. The system of observing teaching and learning has been reviewed and improved to be much more rigorous and comprehensive. The self-assessment report is an accurate statement of the college's strengths and areas for improvement.
24. The arrangements for the professional development of staff are excellent. An extensive programme of staff development is available through the college's own training and professional unit and external events. Training is closely linked to college priorities. The professional development related to teaching and learning and the use of ILT is particularly good. Resources are good in most areas of the college. The college has some new accommodation and two sites which are well maintained but are due for replacement in the next three years.
25. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong ethos of respect and celebration of diversity. The college's response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 (SENDA) are good. There are some excellent examples of effective promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum and the college has responded quickly in developing a strategy for community cohesion. The college has agreed an appropriate policy for safeguarding young people and clear procedures are in place for checking staff appointed by the college. However, not all staff and governors have received training on child protection.
26. The financial management of the college is outstanding. The college is in excellent financial health and uses any surplus to reinvest in educational resources and a high quality learner experience. Value for money is outstanding. Governance is excellent. Governors are very committed and they bring a broad range of skills and expertise to the governing body which serves the college well. They have a very good understanding of the college's performance and take an active interest in the work of the college.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	03/04	971	69	60	9	3393	77	59	18
	04/05	1151	71	64	7	3415	73	62	11
	05/06	1043	73	*	*	3456	76	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	88	80	65	15	2	100	53	47
	04/05	102	75	68	7	1	0	59	-59
	05/06	46	83	*	*	6	67	*	*
NVQs	03/04	155	68	61	7	84	68	62	6
	04/05	198	63	67	-4	69	65	67	-2
	05/06	241	73	*	*	95	76	*	*
Other	03/04	728	68	60	8	3307	77	59	18
	04/05	851	72	64	8	3345	73	61	12
	05/06	756	72	*	*	3355	76	*	*

* The 2005/06 national rates were not available at the time of the inspection

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	03/04	1474	61	56	5	1581	57	54	3
	04/05	1387	63	61	2	1749	60	60	0
	05/06	1199	67	*	*	1727	65	*	*
GCSEs	03/04	128	48	61	-13	187	62	59	3
	04/05	133	62	64	-2	153	61	62	-1
	05/06	95	63	*	*	164	67	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	132	78	63	15	27	74	56	18
	04/05	75	73	67	6	20	80	70	10
	05/06	76	70	*	*	28	68	*	*
NVQs	03/04	380	63	52	11	382	46	53	-7
	04/05	313	70	57	13	409	53	60	-7
	05/06	285	73	*	*	379	70	*	*
Other	03/04	834	60	54	6	985	59	53	6
	04/05	866	59	60	-1	1167	63	59	4
	05/06	743	66	*	*	1156	63	*	*

* The 2005/06 national rates were not available at the time of the inspection

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	03/04	912	48	64	-16	1156	58	53	5
	04/05	810	61	67	-6	1513	62	57	5
	05/06	745	64	*	*	1280	68	*	*
A/A2 Levels	03/04	53	38	84	-46	104	45	66	-21
	04/05	40	40	86	-46	117	50	69	-19
	05/06	56	36	*	*	100	46	*	*
AS Levels	03/04	46	57	63	-6	20	55	50	5
	04/05	3	33	65	-32	36	36	52	-16
	05/06	2	50	*	*	11	55	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	89	53	52	1	23	70	44	26
	04/05	33	70	60	10	9	78	53	25
	05/06	67	54	*	*	4	25	*	*
NVQs	03/04	127	33	54	-21	314	55	47	8
	04/05	100	76	62	14	327	66	54	12
	05/06	61	79	*	*	231	73	*	*
Other	03/04	597	51	56	-5	695	62	56	6
	04/05	634	59	60	-1	1024	63	58	5
	05/06	559	66	*	*	934	69	*	*

* The 2005/06 national rates were not available at the time of the inspection

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2004 to 2006.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No. of learners *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	03/04	Overall	53	51	48	38	31
		Timely	45	36	30	31	19
	04/05	Overall	35	51	48	37	34
		Timely	31	32	31	23	21
	05/06	Overall	10	70	54	30	44
		Timely	13	46	34	8	27
Apprenticeships	03/04	Overall	75	71	47	60	32
		Timely	77	60	24	49	16
	04/05	Overall	86	59	50	45	38
		Timely	87	47	29	40	22
	05/06	overall	109	66	58	59	53
		Timely	102	25	38	20	33

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'