

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Askham Bryan College

Date of visit: 6 May 2008

Context

Askham Bryan College was last inspected in October 2007. The college's overall effectiveness was satisfactory. A new principal was recruited in August 2007. In 2007/08, 692 of the college's 9,342 further education enrolled students were full-time. The college also enrolled 321 higher education students.

Askham Bryan College is a specialist land-based college offering further and higher education courses. The main campus is three miles east of York and outreach learning centres are located in Harrogate, Bedale, Pickering, Thirsk and Guisborough. The college also operates land-based centres in partnership with colleges in Middlesbrough, Scarborough, and Wakefield. The main campus is set in extensive grounds which include a 404 hectare farm, horticulture, animal management and equine units, woodlands and sports facilities. Recent improvements to campus facilities include a purpose built equestrian centre, a new dairy building, a purpose built veterinary nursing unit, and new student accommodation.

Since the previous inspection the college has expanded its work-based learning Train to Gain provision across seven sector subject areas. It has reduced some of its adult provision in line with government funding priorities.

Achievement and standards

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| What progress has been made to improve overall success rates? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving overall success rates for learners on long level 3 courses, key skills success rates and outcomes for apprentices. These were identified as areas for improvement at the college's previous inspection. College data shows that long level 3 success rates improved from 62% in 2005/06 to around 70% in 2006/07. Retention rates on these courses also improved from 66% to around 77% over the same period. Key skill success rates improved significantly from 28% in 2005/06 to 45% in 2006/07 but still remain below national rates. Retention rates on key skills courses have also improved slightly over this period. Apprenticeship success rates improved from 34% in 2005/06 to 54% in 2006/07 but they are still below the national rates of 52% and 61% respectively for the same period. The early indications for the 2007/08 overall success rates for apprentices show that this trend of improvement is being maintained and this is further supported by a high in-year retention rate of over 90%.

Quality of provision

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| What progress has been made to improve target setting and the use of individual learning plans? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection poor use was made of target setting and individual learning plans to support learning and progress. All learners now have good access to tutorial support where targets are agreed and set. Learners value the impartial support they receive from academic support tutors who have been appointed in each curriculum area to support this development. All tutors have undertaken training to improve their skills in setting targets that are linked to students' predicted grades. The college completed an extensive review of individual learning plans that resulted in fundamental changes to the process. The college is establishing an electronic recording system where all learner information on attendance, progress and achievements will be accessible to staff and students.

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| What progress has been made in improving teaching and learning? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection it was noted that more able students were insufficiently challenged. The college has made a range of effective changes to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the inspection. The evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is now informed by the use of a range of performance indicators such as success and attendance rates, commitment to extra activities and lesson observation grades. A significant feature of these improvements is that teachers have had some administrative duties removed from their timetables to allow them more time to plan their lessons. Staff timetabling is now the responsibility of curriculum managers and curriculum teams have greater capacity to focus on the needs of their learners. To further support these new arrangements, the college has appointed academic support tutors to allow teachers to focus more fully on teaching and learning. The staff development plan has accounted for the issues raised at inspection and is now more focused on improving teaching and learning for students across all ability ranges.

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| What progress has been made in the use of information learning technology in improving teaching and learning? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection little use was being made of information learning technology to support learning. The use of information learning technology remains an area for improvement in the college's self-assessment. However, the college has evaluated a range of approaches to implement the use of information learning technology within the curriculum, including the use of interactive electronic boards in classrooms and additional personal computers and new software to support learners with dyslexia. The college has recently upgraded its virtual learning environment. Extensive staff development is being provided to help staff to prepare information

learning technology resources and to become competent in using the new virtual learning environment.

Leadership and management

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| What progress has been made in improving the college governance? | Significant progress |
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Significant progress has been made in improving governors' capacity to set challenging targets and to monitor their impact on college improvements. These were identified as areas for development at the previous inspection. Governors have completed training to enable them to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. They now focus strongly on improving all key aspects of the college. They receive accurate and regular reports from senior managers and work hard to support the principal in her efforts to set challenging targets for all aspects of the college's performance. In particular, governors have made an invaluable contribution in supporting the college to improve its financial management arrangements. Governors' fully appreciate the open and frank management style of the new principal and now use information about the colleges more effectively to question and challenge performance.

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| What progress has been made in improving the colleges' financial management arrangements? | Significant progress |
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At the previous inspection, the college had poor budgetary control arrangements and oversight of college finances. The college has introduced effective measures to resolve these. Significant changes have taken place in the six months since the previous inspection and these have been fully supported by the governors. The college has appointed a new finance director and implemented very effective financial and budgetary control arrangements. The college has reduced significantly its pay and non-pay costs, increased its student numbers and reduced some of its adult part-time provision. The effective use of resources has supported improved success rates across many areas and improved retention rates on most programmes. These measures have placed the college in a significantly more secure financial position with a budget for this year that has been approved by the Learning and Skills Council.

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| What progress has been made in improving quality improvement arrangements? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, quality improvement arrangements were insufficiently focused on improving teaching and learning or the consistency of academic support arrangements. The college now actively promotes a culture of continuous improvement and accountability. Performance indicators and targets have been set at all levels to enable teachers to monitor more closely student retention, attendance, and progress towards qualifications. These targets are thoroughly monitored by curriculum and senior managers. The college has devolved responsibility for quality improvement to curriculum managers and teaching teams.

The college has improved its lesson observation processes and recently extended the observations to include tutorials. A core team of trained staff observe lessons, report on and agree action plans for all teachers graded as satisfactory or inadequate. Curriculum managers are responsible for monitoring actions taken, supporting and where appropriate completing further observations to evaluate improvements. The observation practices are fully validated through paired observations and findings are audited by an external specialist and senior managers.

Generally the judgements on the observation reports reflect the grades awarded. However some reports place too much emphasis on teaching and not enough on the quality of learning.

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| What actions have taken place to consider learners' views? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection the college was recognised as being good at including the learner into college activities and being responsive to the views and needs of learners. The college has maintained this aspect of its work and learners are actively involved in curriculum programme meetings, on the student council and with the college governors meeting. Learners continue to benefit from the college's open communications. Recent improvements include timetable changes that reduce the time between classes, the quality and range of college food in the refectory and learners have also been involved in the recruitment of key curriculum staff.