

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Bishop Auckland College
Date of visit: Thursday 22 January 2009

Context

Bishop Auckland College is a medium sized general further education (GFE) 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 college's business training services facility is based in Newton Aycliffe and provides training opportunities for local and regional employers. The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in childcare and adult social care. The area of South West Durham has a high incidence of socio-economic disadvantage. In 2007, the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was 42% lower than the England average of 47%.

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 sector subject areas were inspected.

Achievement and standards

<p>What progress has been made to improve long course success rates? How does the college improvement compare with the national rate of improvement? What progress has been made to continue the improvement to short course, key skills and work-based learning success rates?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
---	----------------------------

The success rates on long courses for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult students have improved in line with the national average for similar colleges over the last three years. The rate of improvement between 2006/07 and 2007/08 is most significant and is double the national rate of improvement. However, the overall success rate in 2007/08 is below the previous year's national average for similar colleges.

The success rates by level for students aged 16 to 18 on long courses show:

- At level 1 the rate has lost ground to the national average since 2005. In 2007/08 the rate was below the previous year's national average.
- At level 2 the rate has improved in line with the national average and in 2007/08 is at the previous year's national average.
- At level 3 the rate has gained steadily on the national average but in 2007/08 remained significantly below the previous year's national average

The success rates by level for adults on long courses show:

- At level 1 the rate has lost ground to the national average since 2005. In 2007/08 the rate was below the previous year's national average.
- At level 2 the rate has improved in line with the national average and in 2007/08 is at the previous year's national average.
- At level 3 the rate has gained steadily on the national average and in 2007/08 is in line with the previous year's national average.

Success rates on short courses have continued to improve and at 85% are in line with national averages. The overall key skills success rate has improved further and at 63% in 2007/08 is well above the national average.

Overall success rates have improved significantly on advanced apprenticeships and in 2007/08 they are just above the national average. Overall success rates for apprentices in 2007/08 dipped to 60% which is just below the national average. The timely success rates for both groups are below the national averages. Success rates vary significantly across sector subject areas and are high in construction and business administration. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are high.

<p>What progress has been made in improving retention rates following the strategies the college have put into place? What progress has been made to improve retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners? Are they now at national averages?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
--	----------------------------

In 2007/08 the college retention rate increased by 4% which is slightly above the national rate of increase. However, the college's retention rate in 2007/08 of 77% is 5 percentage points below the previous year's national average. The most significant improvements in retention rates have been for learners aged 16 to 18 on level 2 and level 3 courses. Retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults on all levels in 2007/08 remains below the previous year's national averages, except for level 2 courses for learners aged 16 to 18 which is 4 percentage points above.

The college has continued to implement a broad range of strategies to address low retention rates. A range of actions taken by the college have contributed to

improvements in retention since 2007. These include attendance advisors that follow up on absences daily; improved links with local schools to support transition; and the improved assessment and take-up of additional support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs. The access and take-up of advice and guidance has improved, particularly for students who are at risk of leaving college. The college has a number of projects to support and meet the needs of specific groups of learners such as the behaviour support unit, support for young parents and a young carers group.

Quality of provision

<p>What progress has been made by the college to ensure teachers provide sufficient challenge in lessons so that all learners can progress at their own pace, whatever their ability? How effective has the approach been?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
--	----------------------------

The college has given high priority to improving teaching and learning. A senior manager has responsibility for teaching and learning. Support arrangements for teachers include a team of teaching champions, subject learning coaches and a teaching mentor who supports all new teachers. There is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning which includes addressing the issue of differentiation that was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Lesson plans and schemes of work have been greatly improved and now identify strategies for differentiation. Examples seen demonstrate a range of approaches, across all levels of provision, some of which are innovative and clearly demonstrate creativity in the teachers' approach. Some teachers have developed a wide range of extension tasks and activities covering all levels of provision. Higher ability learners are able to complete these tasks, some of which develop their skills of analysis and evaluation. Other approaches enable learners to gain additional units. Learners who progress more slowly are very well supported in lessons through a large team of learning support assistants. In these lessons the teacher is able to spend more time with smaller groups of learners. This enables most learners to progress according to their ability. Within the observation of teaching records there are a growing number of references to differentiation being used effectively and where it needs to improve. The college has invested heavily in the continuing professional development of teachers. A very wide range of training has been provided for teachers including: personalised learning; learning styles; e-learning; assessment for learning; and teacher effectiveness. Sharing of good practice is well developed within subjects and across the college. The quality of teaching is improving. During 2007/08, some 81% of lessons observed by the observation team were good or better. Observation grades are thoroughly moderated both internally and externally incorporating the whole sample and this shows much consistency.

Leadership and management

<p>What progress has been made to improve the quality assurance of tutorials? Has this improved the consistency of tutorials across the college? What is the quality of tutorials in the college?</p>	<p>Reasonable Progress</p>
---	----------------------------

Consistency in the quality assurance of tutorials was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. The college has developed, piloted and implemented a greatly improved individual learning plan (ILP) to support the tutorial process. All personal tutors have been trained on how to write ILPs and how to write targets. Clear responsibilities for checking the completion and quality of ILPs have been given to curriculum managers who carry out their checks frequently and systematically. Action plans identify necessary amendments or omissions and progress towards these are reviewed. In addition, a rolling audit of ILPs checks each course at random. To date a 10% sample has been completed. Reports from the audit process are sent to managers who now have a clearer picture of the quality of ILPs. These demonstrate that the quality of ILPs has improved. However, a minority of tutors set targets which are not sufficiently measurable or time-bound. An appropriate tutorial entitlement includes five annual reviews and weekly group tutorials for full-time learners. Tutorial arrangements for part-time learners are clear. They receive five annual reviews. Tutorial arrangements for learners in the community are not well developed. Every Child Matters themes are well covered during group tutorials using 'well at college' resources. Both one-to-one and group tutorials are incorporated into the teaching observation process. In 2008/09 to date this shows that the quality of tutorials has significantly improved. Of the small sample, 90% were good or better. Evaluation from learners' questionnaires in 2007/08 shows that almost all learners had tutorials and 82% value them. However, this survey is only carried out once per year and has few questions on tutorials. Attendance in tutorials has improved at 83% in 2007/08 but this is below the college average attendance. Learners seen during the visit greatly value one-to-one tutorials but a minority were unclear about the purpose and value of group tutorials.