

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Barnsley College

Date of visit: 4 March 2009

Context

Barnsley College is a large, further education tertiary college serving Barnsley Metropolitan Borough and the surrounding areas in South Yorkshire. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough has a population of approximately 230,000 and has both rural and urban industrial areas. The percentage of school pupils achieving five A to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is below the national average for England. The proportion of people in low-skilled employment in Barnsley is high at 29.6% when compared with the regional average of 24.2% and the average for England of 19%. Approximately 40% of adults in Barnsley hold no formal qualifications, which is substantially higher than the average for England of 29%. The college offers programmes in all fifteen subject sector areas. Approximately 90% of full-time learners are aged 16 to 18, and 88% of part-time learners are adults. The college has increased its provision for learners aged 14 to 16. It has also increased work-based learning through the apprenticeship programme and Train to Gain initiative.

Achievement and standards

What progress has the college made in improving achievements and standards across the range of provision?	Reasonable progress
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The college has continued to improve overall success rates on long programmes at all levels, particularly for those aged 16 to 18, and rates are now broadly in line with 2006/07 national averages. Retention rates are broadly in line with national averages at levels 2 and 3. At level 1, rates are below sector averages by 1% for the age group 16 to 18 and 6% for adults. The college has introduced a number of improvement strategies including targeted information, advice and guidance at recruitment, extended learner support activities, and better tracking and monitoring of learner performance. These have had a positive impact on in-year retention rates with improvements of between 3% and 6% when compared by age within the same period last year. This brings in-year retention rates to approximately 98%. However,

it is too early for inspectors to judge what impact this will have on overall success rates.

The previous monitoring visit identified that work-based learning overall success rates had improved. Advanced apprenticeship rates were slightly below national averages and apprenticeship rates were at national averages. In 2007/08, overall success rates continued to improve and at 68% for advanced apprentices and 70% for apprentices are above national averages. However, these overall rates mask differences between subject areas. High performing areas are business administration and law, construction, and information and communication technology (ICT). Satisfactory performance is seen in retail and commercial enterprise, and engineering. Overall timely success rates are in line with sector averages and are identified as an area for improvement by the college. Early indications show that interventions are improving timely success rates. In 2007/08, Train to Gain overall success rates at 76% are below those of the previous year, but still remain above sector averages. Current success rates are at 100% half way through the contract year.

Overall key skills improvement is good. For learners aged 16 to 18, success rates have improved significantly from low rates in 2005/06 to above sector averages in 2007/08. For adults, level 1 success rates have declined by 7%. At level 2, rates have improved from 14% to 71% over three years.

<p>What progress has the college made in improving GCE A-level and AS-level success rates and the use of value-added data?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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At GCE A-level, after a slight decline in success rates in 2006/07, rates have improved to 91% which is 4% above 2006/07 sector averages. At AS-level, overall success rates have declined and are broadly in line with sector averages. The A-Level Performance System (ALPS) value-added data shows a declining trend over three years which is corroborated by the learner achievement tracker (LAT) value-added system. The college correctly identifies AS-level performance and value-added data as areas for improvement in the self-assessment report. To improve value-added data, the college is piloting a system with learners which uses the learner achievement tracker to set challenging targets based on their performance on entry and monitor their ongoing performance. Learners speak positively about the process.

Quality of provision

<p>What progress has the college made in developing a consistent tutorial programme across the college and is it effective in driving learner progress and achievement?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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In the self-assessment report, the college identified greater focus on improving the consistency of tutorials as an area for improvement. The college has made significant improvement in both the delivery and content of the tutorial programme. Learners speak positively about the focused monitoring of their learning through clearly set targets that are regularly measured and the regularity and usefulness of both their individual and group tutorials. An extremely effective electronic personal learning plan (EPLP) has been developed by the college which is popular with students. Learners have access to the system through the college's virtual learning environment and are able to monitor their own performance, attendance and punctuality. In approximately two thirds of courses, tutors are making good use of the learner achievement tracker to set targets with their learners on projected grades based on their qualifications at entry. Learners are using this system well and are particularly familiar with the projected range of grades they could achieve dependant on their performance. This is acting as a positive motivational tool to encourage learners' aspirations to reach their highest potential. The system is in its pilot stage and by September 2009 the college expects all courses to use this system.

The tutorial programme has been revised. The allocated time for tutorial has been extended to 2 hours each week. This now allows tutors greater flexibility in the delivery of the programme and in the frequency of individual meetings with students. The content of the tutorial has also been redesigned with focused staff training and development to support effective delivery. In addition, an effective mentorship scheme supports staff to improve their delivery of the tutorial programme. The college plans to introduce an accredited mentor qualification for staff.

<p>What progress had the college made in promoting and increasing the take up of enrichment activities?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
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The college is making significant progress in promoting and increasing the uptake of enrichment activities. The college is offering more activities and departments are successfully encouraging learners to participate. Information is now centralised and analysis of the take-up by learners is more detailed. Databases record participation statistics and learner feedback. An enrichment calendar exists, and notice boards around the college display the activities available. Tutorials provide enrichment

activities that promote aspects of 'Every Child Matters' and information, advice and guidance. Activities contribute well to the learners' experience, social enjoyment, confidence and achievement, and are delivered in a safe and inclusive context.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made by the college in being responsive to meeting employers' needs?	Significant progress
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The college has made significant progress with its employer engagement strategy. A centralised team is responsible for the growth, delivery and quality of initiatives. Positive partnership working with local and regional employers and sector skills councils is effectively contributing to workforce skills development. The college has had significant success in extending the range of curriculum in response to employers' needs and in increasing learner numbers in apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. Employer referrals are supporting the college to deliver courses well beyond the local geographical area. An employer survey carried out by the college identified a high level of satisfaction with the college and the standard of learners' work. Good collaborative work is ongoing to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training.

What progress has been made by the college in using target-setting to make improvements at curriculum, course and student levels?	Significant progress
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The college is making significant progress in using target-setting to make improvements. Clear, measurable and well monitored targets are set. The college development plan is the primary source for targets which are effectively shared with staff at all levels. Staff receive good support through training and development to help them work towards and achieve their targets. Staff access meaningful and readily available data that support the setting and monitoring of targets. Targets are rigorously reviewed at performance review meetings and detailed action plans support continued improvement. Target driven performance reviews have encouraged staff to become more accountable for their own performance at class level and have improved their awareness of how they contribute to departmental and overall college performance. Collaborative links between the college and a local primary care trust is using targets well to reduce under-age pregnancy in the area. Staff absence has been effectively reduced through target-setting. Audits of tutorials have found very few instances of clear and measurable targets not being set.

What progress has been made in improving satisfactory and poor performance through the college's observation of teaching and learning (OTL) system?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving teaching and learning. The strategy to improve performance is well defined. Regular meetings between the assistant principal, who has a designated responsibility for teaching and learning, and senior members of staff take place to monitor developments and cascade information and examples of good practice to teaching staff. A formal policy and procedure supports informal peer observations and these are effectively helping staff share good practice and enhance teaching methods and techniques. A 'Practical Toolkit for Excellent Teaching and Learning' is a useful on-line resource for staff. Staff have access to a teachers' centre where they can prepare and practice with resources such as interactive technology and digital cameras. Recent observations of teaching and learning have not identified any unsatisfactory teaching. Observation reports are now more detailed and action plans clearly identify areas for improvement, support and training requirements, and identify good practice and how this is going to be shared. Staff training is well supported. While these initiatives are contributing to an improvement trend in success rates, the rates are around the national averages for similar colleges. Improvements in teaching and learning have contributed to four curriculum areas having increased their overall grades to good; however, four areas still remain as satisfactory.