

Norton Radstock College

General further education college

Inspection dates		20–23 November 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Despite recent improvements in overall outcomes for learners, which were above national average in 2012, attainment on advanced courses was below national average and many apprentices did not complete or achieve their qualifications in the planned timescale.
- Too many learners on long courses across the curriculum areas either do not complete their studies or pass their qualifications.
- Standards of teaching, learning and assessment vary too much and a significant proportion requires improvement.
- Quality assurance arrangements and the resulting improvement planning are not yet fully effective.
- Managers do not focus enough on the improvement of teaching and learning through the performance management of teachers.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners on short courses achieve good success rates.
- Outcomes for 14- to 16-year-old pupils and for learners in the care of local authorities are good.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Tutors know their learners well and provide them with good personal support and care.
- A wide range of provision and productive partnerships with other organisations help the college meet the needs of the local community.
- Governors provide a good level of challenge and support to the management team.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the standard of teaching, learning and assessment, especially in theory lessons, by making sure that teachers use a wider range of teaching methods and improve their use of information and learning technology (ILT).
- Ensure that the methods for providing learners with feedback are consistent and effective, so that they understand how to improve their work.
- Ensure all learners develop their skills in English and mathematics effectively.
- Make sure that teachers promote equality and diversity well in their lessons.
- Make better use of information gathered through initial assessment of learners' skills, in order to formulate well-focused individual learning plans.
- Ensure that curriculum area self-assessment focuses sufficiently on the analysis of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Improve the rigour of performance management.
- Improve the quality and timeliness of planning to ensure that the college meets its strategic objectives and addresses weaknesses identified through self-assessment.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of learners successfully gaining qualifications has improved over the past three years and in 2012 was above recent national averages. This is an improvement on the previous two years when outcomes were broadly around national averages. ▪ The proportion of learners on long courses successfully completing and gaining qualifications has improved from below national averages in the previous three years and is now broadly at national averages. Attainments for learners on short courses, especially those in subcontracted provision, are good and well above national averages. ▪ The majority of learners achieve outcomes in line with those predicted by their previous attainment. Learners aged 16 to 18 on foundation programmes make good progress, as do adult learners at intermediate level. However, outcomes for learners taking advanced courses are poor and have not significantly improved over the past three years. ▪ Outcomes for apprentices are below national averages and too many do not complete their qualifications within the planned time. College managers and teachers are aware of this weakness and have put in place strategies to address it. Learners' attainments on workplace training programmes are in line with national averages. ▪ Learners on land-based and leisure, travel and tourism programmes achieve good outcomes. However, in a range of courses across the rest of the curriculum, outcomes are broadly at national averages, but vary too much and, in many courses, not enough learners pass their qualifications. ▪ In 2012, learners' attainments for mathematics functional skills at intermediate level were above national average. Attainments for functional skills in English at all levels were more modest, but were also above national averages. Learners' pass rates at grades A* to C in GCSE mathematics were low. ▪ Pupils aged 14 to 16 on part-time vocational courses and learners who are in the care of local authorities are well supported and make good progress at the college. ▪ Attendance and punctuality are generally good. Many learners come to college on buses provided by the college as a high proportion live in isolated rural communities. 	

- The small number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has levels of attainment in line with those for the whole student body. No significant achievement gaps exist between male and female learners, or between learners receiving additional learning support and those who do not. Learners who identify themselves as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make progress in line with their peers.
- The college has no reliable data on the proportion of learners progressing from foundation programmes to intermediate programmes or from intermediate programmes to advanced programmes. In 2012, 43 learners were successful in gaining places on university courses.
- Learners attain higher standards of work in practical sessions when compared with their attainment in theory lessons. They also develop relevant personal, social and employability skills in their studies. Employers particularly value the way work-based learners develop these important skills.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers and their learners have good working relationships and a core of good teaching exists in the college. However, inspectors observed no outstanding lessons; most lessons were judged to require improvement and a small number were judged inadequate.
- In the best lessons, teachers plan carefully and learners are actively involved in relevant activities and discussions. Teachers provide good individual help and support to the learners who respond well as this is the teaching style they expect. Learners make more progress and show more enjoyment in practical work than they do in lessons concerned with theory.
- Many of the less effective lessons are dull and the tasks set do not require the learners to work hard enough and make good enough progress. The teachers do not have high enough expectations of their learners nor present them with enough interesting challenges. Some teachers talk for too long and do not ask learners enough questions to check their understanding.
- In many lessons, learners spend too much time writing and copying out notes and do not have enough opportunity to make the most of their teacher's expertise. Many teachers do not effectively promote equality and diversity during their lessons.
- However, teachers use innovative approaches and good learning opportunities for the substantial number of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A joint project with the local council provides very good real work placements across a number of the council's departments. Learners enjoy these and make very good progress, some of them onto apprenticeship programmes and employment.
- Teachers plan assessments well and mark learners' work fairly. Learners' practical skills are assessed well, but the assessment of written work is less effective. The standard of teachers' feedback on learners' written work varies too much. Some teachers provide detailed and thorough feedback to help learners to improve; some do not.
- Assessors make good use of direct observations in the workplace to check on apprentices' and other work-based learners' progress. They record progress well and set learners clear targets. Employers have opportunities to contribute feedback on learners' progress, but this is not always used to inform planning.
- Learners are often well supported by their personal tutors, who provide them with good support and guidance on career choices. However, subject teachers do not always make effective use of the detailed initial assessment information on learners. They do not match learning tasks to the initial assessment data so that learners have achievable challenges to help them progress.
- Learners make little use of ILT in their lessons. In a minority of subject areas, the virtual learning environment (VLE) is well developed and learners can locate good materials to help them outside lessons, and can both submit their work and have it marked electronically. In many other subject areas, however, few materials are placed on the network for learners to use.

- Learners' skills in English and mathematics are not being developed consistently well across the college. Some teachers systematically correct spelling and grammar mistakes in written work, whilst others do not. In some vocational subjects, learners do not have enough opportunities to develop numeracy skills.

Health, public services and care

Learning programmes for 16-18

Learning programmes for 19+

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved outcomes for learners which remain broadly at recent national averages. In the better lessons teachers use a good variety of methods and activities to engage and motivate learners. However, a minority of lessons are not planned well enough, the pace is too slow and individual needs and interests of learners are not met.
- Teachers use their vocational knowledge and experience well to make sure learners understand how to apply theoretical concepts, such as the stages of human development, to their workplace experience. In the main, learners enjoy their studies; they develop greater personal awareness and relevant vocational skills. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of technology to support and promote learning.
- College staff conduct detailed initial assessments of the skills of individual learners, particularly those with additional needs, and send reports to teachers. However, teachers do not always use this information to plan lessons or to set individual targets for learners. Tutorial sessions do not focus closely enough on assessment or progress.
- Teachers do not always provide learners with sufficient opportunities to improve their English and mathematics. A minority teachers do not routinely correct spelling and grammar in learners' assignments. Mathematics is rarely integrated into learning activities despite many naturally occurring opportunities where this could be done.
- In the best lessons, learners receive appropriate and regular verbal feedback on what to do to improve their skills. However, written feedback on marked work is inconsistent and progress reviews do not always help learners set clear targets for themselves. Targets are too generic and do little to inform learners on how to progress.
- Childcare learners benefit from a good range of work experience placements rich with learning opportunities. However, the learners do not receive sufficient assessment and support during their placements. Communication between employers and teachers is not developed well enough to plan and review learning, and visits are too infrequent.
- Teachers provide good individual care and support for learners. They understand the barriers faced by some learners and respond quickly and effectively in partnership with other organisations to make sure learners get the personal support they need.
- Teachers successfully promote the development of learners' employability skills by valuing each individual's contribution and fostering a positive environment of concern and support. Learners attend well because they enjoy coming to college and value their courses and the skills they develop.
- Outcomes for work-based learning apprentices are good. They benefit from well-organised assessments that are used to monitor their progress and attainment. Assessors are particularly flexible when arranging assessment schedules and respect the demands of busy employers.
- The majority of learners have a clear understanding of what they intend to do once their courses have ended and many progress into employment or further study. Advice and guidance on progression are satisfactory. Teachers do not, however, promote equality and diversity well enough in lessons.

Engineering and motor vehicle**Learning programmes for 16-18****Learning programmes for 19+****Apprenticeships**

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement as do the attainments for learners in this subject area. Outcomes for learners on long qualifications have been below national averages for a number of years.
- Teaching and learning in practical sessions are good and learners develop relevant engineering and motor vehicle skills. For example, learners in mechanical engineering successfully complete practical assignments to realistic commercial timescales. However, learners on full-time programmes do not benefit from planned work experience to widen their knowledge and understanding of engineering in the workplace.
- Learners do not make good progress in theory lessons. Too often they are asked to copy down notes without enough discussion or checks of their understanding. These lessons are dull and uninspiring, and the pace of learning is too slow.
- In a minority of lessons teachers do not differentiate the learning activities to meet the full range of learners' abilities and development. In addition, they do not always use the detailed initial assessment data supplied at the beginning of each course to inform their lesson planning.
- Work-based learning assessors work well to arrange assessment schedules that respect the demands of busy employers and meet the needs of the trainees. However, a minority of apprentices do not have realistic target dates by which to complete their training.
- Apprentices develop good personal, social and employability skills in the workplace. In the best workplaces employers offer good support for the apprentices and take a strong interest in the importance and relevance of off-the-job training. However, other employers are not aware enough of the relationship between on- and off-the-job training and assessment.
- Learners on full-time programmes make reasonable progress in relation to their attainments at the start of their programmes. However, teachers do not always give learners useful written feedback on how to improve their written assignments. In addition, teachers do not follow up marked assignments by helping learners to set realistic targets for improvement.
- Specialist resources in engineering are good and the learners use them well to develop relevant vocational skills. Resources in motor vehicle are old, but fit for purpose.
- Learners get good personal support from their teachers and enjoy their training and study. However, teachers and other staff do not provide enough advice and guidance on progression pathways to both full- and part-time learners nearing the end of their programmes.
- Learners, teachers and trainers work safely in the college and the workplace. Teachers and trainers have successfully established a culture of safe working practices. For example, motor vehicle learners, without prompting, wear hard hats at all times when working under vehicle hoists.
- Although engineering learners achieve functional skills success rates above national averages, many do not make enough progress in developing their literacy and numeracy. Teachers do not correct spelling and grammar mistakes consistently in students' assessed work.
- Equality and diversity are not promoted sufficiently in lessons. Teachers do not plan to bring the wider world into the engineering curriculum.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Learning programmes for 16-18 Learning programmes for 19+ Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning in hairdressing and beauty therapy requires improvement. Although learners on advanced programmes achieve good outcomes, those on foundation level, intermediate level and on work-based learning programmes achieve outcomes at or below recent national averages.
- Learners successfully develop practical hairdressing and beauty therapy skills which support their progression into employment. They have access to appropriate work experience in local salons. The best employers support the learners well and apprentices benefit from good and diverse training opportunities.
- Teachers plan their lessons and practical work thoroughly and set assignments and learning activities that meet the needs of the learners. In a significant proportion of lessons, learning activities are not focused enough on developing autonomy and independence and the pace of learning is slow.
- Resources for learning are good. The salons and specialist equipment are well used by the learners to develop relevant employability skills.
- In too many lessons the assessment methods are narrow and teachers do not explore learners' understanding enough. In full-time programmes assessments do not always capture learners' progress and skills development. Trainers' feedback to apprentices is clear and guidance on progress is good, but improvement targets for apprentices are inconsistent in quality.
- Initial assessment is good. It accurately identifies learners' additional support needs and enables staff to place learners onto the right courses. Teachers regularly review learners' progress and set them appropriate targets to improve. However, they do not always link learning activities to the detailed information in the initial assessments.
- Learners have good relationships with their teachers and trainers in hairdressing and beauty therapy. They enjoy their work and appreciate the individual support they get from staff. However, activities focused on developing learners' English, mathematics and functional skills are insufficiently linked to learners' main programmes of study.
- Teachers promote safe working practices in all that they do. The learners respond well and work safely in the salons and workplaces.
- Learners do not make enough use of ILT to widen their knowledge and understanding of their industry. Teachers promote equality and diversity in salons and the workplace through a culture of mutual respect. Other, wider issues of equality and diversity are not sufficiently developed in lessons and training, and schemes of work do not contain enough plans to promote equality and diversity in programmes of study.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The college's mission is appropriate to its context: it seeks to provide excellent learning and support, inspiring learning and nurturing success. Teaching, however, does not yet consistently inspire learners. The college has not devised a plan to implement its strategic objectives for the current year; nevertheless, last year, a renewed focus on improving retention bore results.
- Governors know the college well and do not shy from offering incisive challenge or requiring improvements. They are closely involved in setting the strategic direction of the college. They monitor academic performance and the outcomes of lesson observations with some vigour. The growth and sustainability strategy allows close scrutiny of the college's finances.

- The assessment of teaching and learning is well organised, with clear guidance and appropriate moderation. However, observers do not sufficiently evaluate the impact of teaching on learning in a minority of lesson observations and grades awarded can be over generous. The resulting professional development plans for teachers are not always completed promptly enough.
- Appraisal is well structured and focuses on reviewing past performance and setting objectives for improvement. Some managers do not appraise staff frequently enough and links between appraisal and lesson observations are not strong enough. Teachers receive the training they need, but the college does not have a systematic approach to updating vocational skills in motor vehicle engineering.
- Arrangements for self-assessment are robust and follow a clear schedule. The college self-assessment report is concise and broadly accurate, but it needs a greater focus on learners' progression within and beyond the college.
- Curriculum area self-assessment varies too much in quality and can be superficial. The analysis of the craft of teaching and learning is sparse. Quality improvement planning is not prompt enough. The college does not yet have an improvement plan for 2012/13 and most curriculum areas have not produced an improvement plan either. The evaluation of the quality of subcontracted provision is not consistently searching enough.
- Teachers and managers make appropriate use of learners' and employers' views. Learners' opinions are integrated into lesson observations. The Principal regularly has lunch with learners to determine their views and the college makes appropriate use of three surveys a year.
- The college meets the needs and interests of its local community through productive partnerships and good use of local intelligence. The provision is wide ranging, in view of the college's size, and offers the chance of advancement from one level to another and onto further study or employment. Employers have contributed to course design and some apprenticeships are tailored to meet specific employer needs.
- Courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have successfully led to paid employment. The integration of bus and college timetables means many more learners can attend college from the largely rural local area.
- A good equality scheme, well-devised objectives and detailed action plan support the college's ambition for an inclusive community to be achieved through effective promotion and management of equality and diversity, eliminating all forms of discrimination. An active equality focus group further strengthens the college's approach. However, more extensive promotion of equality and diversity in curriculum areas and across the college is needed.
- The college has successfully narrowed the achievement gap between learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and others. Training relating to equality and diversity is appropriate, but very effective materials purchased recently are not yet fully used by teachers. Incidents and complaints are closely monitored for equality issues and bullying is not tolerated.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Policies are appropriate, although not reviewed regularly enough, and cooperation with a wide range of agencies is highly effective, particularly in relation to looked after children. Training is appropriate, but the designated child protection liaison officer has not had update training at the required level recently enough. All staff, governors and learners are taking a basic formal qualification in safeguarding.
- New staff receive guidance on professional conduct and on current arrangements on the protection of children and vulnerable adults; this guidance does not focus sufficiently on identifying signs of abuse or documenting disclosures. Employment checks are appropriate and the management of health and safety is effective.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Norton Radstock College

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health, public services and care	3
Engineering and motor vehicle	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	166	18	214	39	153	35	0	0
Part-time	61	428	73	745	20	483	4	43
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	28	25	7	25	1	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16	59							
Number of community learners	66							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency, Skills Funding Agency HE Loans (Student Loan Company) HEIs (partnership), ESF (partnership)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learning Curve (JAA) ■ N-Gaged Training ■ Templegate Training 							

Additional socio-economic information

Norton Radstock College is a small general further education college in rural north-east Somerset providing vocational programmes in all 15 subject areas. The college has a main site in Radstock, a centre in Keynsham and a number of small community venues. Attainment at GCSE in local schools is modest and many learners come to the college with low prior attainment. Most learners are on foundation and intermediate programmes and the college offers apprenticeships in six subject areas. Health, public services and care and preparation for life and work recruit the highest number of learners each year. The college works with schools and training providers to broaden vocational opportunities for learners aged 14 to 16, and offers foundation degrees and access to higher education courses. Around 5% of the learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds; a proportion higher than that in the local population. The college draws a significant number of learners from areas of high deprivation.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Alex Falconer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, supported by the senior manager for student support services as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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