

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

Sixth form college

Inspection dates		12–15 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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 students

This provider requires improvement because:

- Outcomes for students are not high enough and need improving for the majority of qualification types and student groups, especially those studying AS-level qualifications. The persistent underperformance of some advanced-level subjects requires improving very quickly.
- Not enough teaching and learning are good and outstanding.
- The quality and effectiveness of assessment are too inconsistent and do not support all students in achieving their full potential.
- Individual tutorials are not fully effective in setting challenging targets to support the progress of all students. Targets are often too long term and vague.
- Performance management has not been effective in improving poorly performing subjects. Performance management has not led to the setting of specific staff targets that lead to individual accountability.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement plans are not consistent in their quality or effectiveness. Subject self-assessments do not always contain clear judgements or identify the key areas to improve. Too many quality improvement plans, especially those for poorly performing subjects do not clearly identify what leaders, managers and teachers need to do to improve.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Students' attendance is very good and they enjoy their learning.
- The key role the college plays in raising standards and aspirations in the local community and with students.
- The culture of learning, respect and self-belief that exists in the college.
- The collective will and passion of staff to improve the quality of provision.
- The good support for progression to the next stage of education, especially higher education, that teachers provide for students.
- Good financial management.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the outcomes for students by identifying those courses which have consistently underperformed and developing robust action plans to bring about improvements in the proportion of students who achieve each qualification, the progress each student makes and a reduction in the number who leave early.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that a higher proportion of lessons are good and outstanding by identifying best practice both within the existing college staff and at other providers. Best practice should then be shared, with targets for improvement being set for each teacher to address the areas for improvement identified from lesson observation and self-assessment.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teachers' assessment feedback to their students through staff training, sharing best practice, implementing minimum expected standards and using quality assurance procedures to ensure they are implemented consistently.
- Improve the quality and effectiveness of individual tutorials by scheduling these earlier in the academic year for new students and agreeing specific and measurable short- and medium-term targets to support students' progress towards their target grades.
- Improve the effectiveness of performance management through the setting of specific staff targets for improvement and regular monitoring of progress towards achieving these. Targets should enable individual accountability for the management of performance and directly tackle areas of consistent underperformance.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the self-assessment and subject improvement planning processes to ensure that these focus on the improvements required to teaching, learning and assessment to bring about positive changes in the progress students make and the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications.
- Provide governors with evaluative summaries of key data and other performance information to enable them to support and challenge senior managers effectively.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for students	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for students require improvement because not enough students achieve the qualifications that they start and there are too many subjects in which achievement rates have been low for several years. The proportion of students who achieve advanced-level qualifications has declined over the last three years and is now below the rate for similar colleges nationally. ▪ About one quarter of students who start AS-level courses either leave the course early or do not pass. The proportion of students who achieved intermediate-level qualifications increased in 2012/13 and is now satisfactory. Students on workplace learning programmes in health and social care achieve their qualifications at a high rate. ▪ Students who achieve AS-level qualifications make very good progress in subject areas such as law, health and social care, English language and English literature. The progress of students studying applied science, art, design and technology and geography is poor. A-level students' progress is as expected but there is significant variation across subjects. The proportion of AS-level students who leave their course early has improved slightly in 2012/13 and is now around the rate for similar colleges nationally. ▪ Managers have identified where gaps between the rates of achievement of different groups exist but they are yet to implement strategies to close the gaps. Male students achieve their 	

qualifications at a lower rate than females. Students who need additional support achieve at a rate lower than that for similar students nationally.

- Students who have not yet achieved GCSEs in English and mathematics prior to joining the college continue to study these courses as part of their study programme. Around half achieve GCSE mathematics and around two thirds achieve GCSE English at grades A* to C. Students' development of their English and mathematics skills in their subject lessons and through feedback on marked work is inconsistent.
- Staff provide well-structured support for progression to higher education, further education and employment. The large majority of students progress to university, further study or employment. A significant proportion of applicants to higher education are the first in their family to do so.
- Students develop good personal and social skills while they are at college. They behave in a respectful manner with each other, with staff and towards their environment. The student union has helped to further the sense of community through the organisation of social events and organising personal safeguarding talks prior to these events. Students' attendance is very good and effective actions are in place to improve the attendance of a small proportion of students who do not attend regularly.
- The majority of students apply for work-experience placements with an increasing range of locally based employers which help them to develop relevant skills and attitudes that will benefit them when they start work. A small number are successful in progressing to apprenticeship roles and jobs with prestigious national employers in the local area, occasionally with their work-experience employer.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement because not enough lessons are good or better and the quality of assessment is too variable. This is reflected in the need to improve outcomes on too many courses.
- In better lessons, teachers use their knowledge of students' interests and progress to organise groups or pairings which lead to lively collaborative learning. Carefully timed activities encourage students to push each other to arrive at a solution or proposal which can be shared with the rest of the group. Teachers use a wide range of activities to involve students and keep them motivated. They use questioning skilfully to probe and test the thinking behind each response, rather than accept answers at face value. In these lessons a brisk pace is maintained, while preserving sufficient space for students to reflect, evaluate and share ideas. For example, in law, pairs of students were engrossed in analysing criminal scenarios to establish the current applicable legislation and likely consequences.
- A very small minority of lessons are outstanding. Such lessons are characterised by a shared passion for the subject amongst the teacher and students, humour, enjoyment and very thorough development of skills and knowledge. In an outstanding mathematics lesson students acquired a deep understanding of the principles of probability and applied their learning to both serious and humorous scenarios, including the likelihood that their teacher would cease to nag them, and the prospect of a particular group member wearing a stupid t-shirt on Children in Need day.
- In weaker lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to ensure all students can make good progress. In these lessons students work conscientiously, but some encounter difficulties which teachers do not identify quickly enough, which slows their progress. The more able students find some of the work too easy. Teachers in weaker lessons do not assess learning sufficiently thoroughly and, as a result, students are not clear about what progress they should have made in their learning, and whether they have achieved this.
- Very wide variations exist in the quality of assessment of written work between subjects. In weaker subjects teachers provide students with insufficient guidance on how they can improve

or minimal written feedback, relying too heavily on conversations in class. A few teachers provide generic comments of encouragement or approval. In better subjects, teachers use a more structured and helpful approach referring to assessment criteria and encouraging students to reflect on their performance as part of a continuing dialogue with the teacher. Managers have recognised that these variations require improvement.

- The development of English is inconsistent. Students' English skills are assessed when they join the college and, where necessary, additional diagnostic assessments are undertaken to ensure that the correct support is provided. Some teachers correct English in written work meticulously but others do this less thoroughly. Some work contains consistently repeated errors of spelling or grammar that are not corrected by teachers.
- Staff and students have successfully built a strong sense of community based on respect for others. Consequently, students feel secure in expressing themselves in lessons and take a pride in the college environment. Managers have identified the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons as a priority for professional development. As a result many teachers now carefully include how they will develop their students' understanding of these issues in their lesson planning but they are not always skilful enough in ensuring the ideas are delivered effectively.
- Managers have established very good links and partnerships with local schools that enable students to progress smoothly into a college learning programme. Students who need extra help with learning are identified very early, and support is quickly made available. A number of students with complex support needs succeed in their studies and progress well, although students who have a declared support need do not all achieve as well as their peers. Higher entry criteria and better advice and guidance were introduced for advanced-level courses in September 2013 to ensure students are enrolled on courses they have the potential to achieve. The impact of this cannot yet be fully assessed.
- Students enjoy a wide range of enrichment and volunteering activities ranging from Duke of Edinburgh Award to salsa dancing. Strong links with local employers enable the college to arrange work experience opportunities for many advanced-level students.
- Students receive a wide range of support to help them with progression to their next stage and personal issues. Group tutorials enable the college to disseminate information but require improvement as they are not valued by all students. Tutors use individual meetings to review each students' overall progress and set targets for improvement but these are not held sufficiently quickly for students who are new to the college and do not result in clear and specific targets for improvement.
- Resources to support learning are good. Many subjects have developed a wide range of resources for the virtual learning environment (VLE) which students use effectively. This enables learning to continue outside the classroom. Students find interactive quizzes and revision notes particularly useful.
- Managers have identified the need to improve some specific aspects of teaching and learning. Staff development events for all teachers covering issues such as assessment, active learning and improving literacy are well attended. The impact of this training is evident in the better lessons.

Science

16-19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Outcomes for students are too inconsistent across the science subjects. Students in physics achieve well and make good progress. Students on other advanced-level courses make progress in line with expectations. On AS-level courses in biology and chemistry, the proportion of students who complete and achieve their qualification declined further in 2012/13 to well-below average. The proportion of students

who completed their course in GCSE biology was low, but those who sat the examination achieved well.

- Students attend well. In the most effective lessons, they respond well to the teachers' challenging approach and high expectations. Challenging tasks in physics helped students to compare electric and magnetic fields. Skilful questioning in a biology lesson enabled all to contribute to discussions on water potential. In chemistry, students evaluated the structure of DNA confidently and in geology, teachers' frequent checks on learning helped students to develop their understanding of global tectonics.
- Less-effective features of lessons include tasks or questions that do not provide sufficient scope for students to evaluate, discuss ideas or contribute answers. In these instances some students lose focus and do not make as much progress as they could.
- Students' learning is supported by the good resources in well-equipped and efficiently serviced laboratories. Teachers use interactive whiteboards frequently, for example, in physics to demonstrate the action of capacitors and in geology to demonstrate fold forms. Students benefit from their ready access to a broad range of resources on the college's VLE, and in particular the opportunities they provide to assess their own learning through, for example, topical quizzes.
- Students have a good understanding of how well they are achieving against their target grades. They have easy access to workshops in all subjects but staff have acknowledged the need for a more rigorous and targeted approach to students' attendance at these. The electronic progress-tracking system is not yet deployed effectively for identifying those who are underachieving and setting specific targets for improvement to support students' progress.
- Teachers set homework frequently, and mark it carefully against examination criteria which help students to understand the rigour and requirements of external assessment. Teachers make useful comments and correct scientific errors, but information on what to do to improve is not always specific enough. The correction of spelling mistakes, including of key technical terms, is not done routinely.
- Initial assessment includes an appropriate focus on students' mathematical skills and support is provided where required. Students in physics and chemistry take additional appropriate mathematics courses. Assessments are not as effective in identifying where students require help with English skills. A broad range of initiatives help to develop students' scientific skills. For example, master classes in physics, entries to the chemistry Olympiad, links to biology-related industry, and geology expeditions broaden students' experiences.
- Staff have taken appropriate action to improve initial advice and guidance. This year, students were assessed more rigorously to determine their suitability for advanced-level courses but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this action. Support for those progressing to higher education and to employment is well structured.
- Students show respect for others and behave well. Teachers routinely identify opportunities to promote equality and diversity in lesson plans. In chemistry, for example, students discussed the often-overlooked role of Rosalind Franklin in the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA.

English

16-19 study programmes

Good

- Teaching and learning are good; the vast majority of students pass their qualifications with many achieving high grades and making very good progress. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good and fewer students left AS-level courses in 2012/13. Lessons help students to develop their skills of analysis and creative writing.

- Students' work is very often of a high standard. At GCSE, their creative writing shows very effective use of sensual imagery. Students on all courses use specialist terms with confidence and illustrate these with good examples. Teachers' high expectations develop students' confidence and ambitions. They ask challenging questions that help students to think for themselves and consider different points of view. In an AS-level lesson the teacher's very good questioning encouraged students to explore opposing perspectives of Heathcliff's character in *Wuthering Heights*. However, teachers sometimes rely on a minority of students for answers. Occasionally teachers provide an answer to a question rather than drawing ideas from students.
- Teachers plan a variety of ways to ensure that students learn well during lessons. Well-organised activities, structured worksheets and a good balance of whole-class, pair and group work help students to develop good understanding. Teachers deliver lesson activities at a good pace, ensuring that students work hard and use their time productively. However, too few lessons are outstanding.
- Teachers are very enthusiastic about their subject and they provide good opportunities for students to learn from one another. Students share ideas and support one another's learning. They show high levels of interest and motivation in their lessons and talk enthusiastically about their studies. In A-level English language lessons students thoroughly enjoyed learning from one another as they worked in groups reading aloud words written in phonemic symbols and producing a summary of the key points of different language theories.
- Students on advanced-level courses use the VLE well to learn outside lessons. Interactive quizzes, podcasts of poetry readings and interviews with language experts help to bring the subjects to life and provide stimulating ways for students to learn. Study guides and examples of examination papers are beneficial to students' revision. Resources for GCSE English are very limited and require development.
- Students make good progress in lessons. They understand how to approach their work and are confident that they know how to improve. In AS- and A-level workshop lessons students used a simple 'RAG-rating' technique to identify the progress they had made and to set their targets for the lesson.
- Lessons help to prepare students very well for their examinations. Students carefully analyse written work of a high standard, and use examples of best practice to carry out peer assessments and suggest improvements. For example, GCSE students used assessment criteria to grade descriptive writing and explain their decisions.
- Teachers mark students' homework in detail, indicating particularly good points and correcting inaccurate spelling or punctuation. However, teachers' comments do not always explain how students have done in comparison with their target grades, and how they can improve their work.
- Students develop a good understanding of diversity. They work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Students with particular learning or emotional needs receive good support. In English language lessons students examined how language contributes to gender stereotypes and watched an interesting video clip illustrating how regional accents can influence people's views.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The Principal, governors, managers and teachers are inspired by their mission to raise the achievements and aspirations of students in their local area through excellent teaching and learning. The college has made its strategic priority to develop a respectful, well-resourced environment where learning can be effective and enjoyable.
- The Principal is committed to working collaboratively with local schools and colleges and other stakeholders to ensure a choice of high quality post-16 provision in Barrow-in-Furness. He plays a full part in a number of local partnerships including charring 'Cumbria Aspires' which is working to improve life chances and opportunities for school and college leavers.

- The governing body has considerable experience and a good range of relevant expertise. It is proud to be associated with the college and of the contribution it has made to education in Barrow-in-Furness. Governors participate fully in strategic planning, responding well to recruitment challenges and the needs of the local community. They have ensured that at the same time as improving the learning environment the college has retained good financial status.
- Governors have not always been sufficiently well informed by evaluative executive reports to be able to offer appropriate support and challenge to the senior team. Where governors are well informed by managers, such as in financial planning, they have made appropriate challenges.
- A dynamic, representative and purposeful student union has played an increasing part in the life of the college, successfully arranging charitable fundraising, safeguarding and social events. Students believe teachers and managers treat them fairly, they feel listened to and appreciate the approachability of staff. The student union is currently contributing to traffic calming measures in the college.
- Leaders and managers have over-estimated the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment. The college's lesson-observation scheme has not adequately identified the areas for improvement to teaching which will enable all students to make good progress and pass their qualifications.
- The recent reorganisation of the middle management team has not yet resulted in consistently improved outcomes. The Principal and senior leaders are not set sufficiently challenging targets in their performance reviews. Performance management requires improvement because it does not allow for effective individual accountability. Managers do not link lesson observation outcomes into the appraisal process consistently. At best, teachers' appraisals include detailed targets for student outcomes and improvements in teaching and learning, but many do not include either, and targets are not precise or measurable.
- The college's evaluation of its own provision requires improvement. Although some valuable professional development has been planned as a result of self-assessment, it has not been effective in securing high standards in all subjects. In 2012/13 most outcome targets were not met. The college's self-assessment report recognises that there is a greater need for sharp and measurable target-setting but this has not yet been achieved.
- Senior leaders, managers and teachers are committed to continuing to offer a broad range of A-level courses and have invested in sustaining this offer. They have taken innovative approaches to ensure an inclusive and appropriate curriculum for all students, including a small intermediate-level programme and plans for traineeships. Study programmes include opportunities for all students to undertake work experience and to participate in a broad range of enrichment. The large majority of students are following A-level programmes of study and some are part of the 'Academically Very Able Programme' that is a popular and growing opportunity for the more-able students to experience additional challenge and raise their aspirations from Year 10 onwards.
- Senior leaders have had a limited strategic approach to equality and diversity. Effective staff training has resulted in some good inclusive classroom practice where students work well with each other. Teachers are focused on raising aspirations and creating an ethos of hard work. In a few classes good use is made of unanticipated opportunities to challenge stereotypes and extend learning but this good practice is not shared.
- Safeguarding is good and the college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Staff and students know whom to approach if issues arise. The strong partnerships the college has forged with local schools have assisted in the recent improvements in passing on information to enable the timely support of enrolled students. Students feel physically and emotionally safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Science	3
English	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Sixth form college							
Age range of learners	16-18							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 787							
	Part-time: 242							
Principal/CEO	Mr David Batten							
Date of previous inspection	January 2009							
Website address	www.barrow6fc.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
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	0	0	34	2	736	15	0	0
Part-time	0	6	1	136	13	84	0	2
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Contextual information

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College is a small sixth-form college with a single site in the town and is the only sixth-form college in Cumbria. The vast majority of learners are aged 16 to 18. The number of learners from a minority ethnic background is very low. The proportion of the local population who hold no qualification is slightly above the national average and about two thirds have achieved intermediate-level qualifications. In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was below the national average. Barrow-in-Furness' ranking on the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation, makes it one of the most deprived local authorities in England. Unemployment in the area is around the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Richard Pemble HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Deputy Principal 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 students' 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 students 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 college. 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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