



Northbrook College

Better
education
and care

Re-inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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Introduction

Northbrook College was inspected in October 2004. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in information and communications technology (ICT) and work-based learning in engineering, construction, and sport and leisure, which were found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of publication of the original inspection report. If inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The less than satisfactory curriculum area and WBL areas were re-inspected on 14 and 15 November 2006. The outcomes of the re-inspection are as follows.

Curriculum area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
ICT	4	3

Context

The college offers ICT courses from beginners' to higher education level. Around 120 students aged 16 to 18 take first or national diploma courses, including a course in games development. Most adult enrolments are on flexible learning courses, either in workshops or through distance learning. The flexible learning provision was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection and was not re-inspected.

Strengths

- high pass rates on full-time courses
- good support for students
- good learning resources.

Areas for improvement

- low retention rates on full-time courses
- some undemanding teaching.

Achievement and standards

Pass rates on full-time courses have improved significantly over the last two years, and are now above national averages at all levels. Although pass rates are high, in 2005/06 retention rates fell to below the national average. Students make good progress on most courses, and those who finish the course generally achieve higher grades than predicted from their prior attainment. The college has taken positive steps to improve students' attendance and punctuality, and these are now satisfactory. The standard of students' work is satisfactory, with most students demonstrating appropriate levels of competence in both their oral and written work.

Quality of provision

The college judges teaching and learning to be satisfactory, and inspection evidence supports this view. Lessons are carefully planned and teachers use information and learning technologies well to enrich learning. In the best lessons, students are fully engaged and work productively. However, in some lessons too little is expected of students, and there is a lack of pace and challenge in the work. Support for students is good. Help with personal and course-related problems is readily available and liaison with parents is good. Computers are of high specification and there is a plethora of software and commercially-produced learning materials available. These provide students with good access to IT facilities both within lessons and during private study time. The managed learning environment is well developed. The college offers a good range of courses which provide students with opportunities to study topics which they find of interest.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have improved and are now satisfactory. Significant progress has been made in improving teaching standards, assessment practice, and students' attendance and punctuality. Measures to improve retention rates have been less successful. Internal lesson observations provide an accurate assessment of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report is suitably self-critical and correctly identifies weaknesses, but exaggerates the significance of some strengths.

Work-based learning area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Engineering WBL	4	3

Context

There are currently 37 students on work-based motor vehicle engineering programmes, of whom 26 are apprentices. The remaining 11 are advanced apprentices. There are 24 students aged 16 to 18 years old and 13 adults. Motor vehicle students attend college on one day a week for their technical certificate and key skills, and are assessed in the work-place for their national vocational qualification (NVQ).

Strengths

- good resources to support teaching and learning
- particularly effective action to promote improvement.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates for advanced apprenticeships
- insufficiently challenging targets in students' progress reviews.

Achievement and standards

Students' practical work is of a good standard. Many work in prestigious motor vehicle main dealerships and work to standards that meet these companies' requirements. Portfolios are well organised and presented. The achievement of completed frameworks for apprentices has continuously improved during the past three years from 25% to 59% and is now in line with national and regional averages. However, the success rates for advanced apprentices continue to be low. The indications are that students currently on the advanced apprenticeship scheme are on target to complete within their targeted timescales.

Quality of provision

Teaching and training are satisfactory. Resources to support teaching and learning are particularly good, and effective use is made of Information Learning Technology (ILT), visual aids and a range of innovative techniques that engage students. The identification of students' additional learning needs is satisfactory and the support provided is highly valued by those who receive it. Effective action has been taken to improve the achievement of the key skills element of the apprenticeship frameworks. Students now have a much clearer understanding of the role of key skills and the activities that demonstrate their competence. Progress reviews take place frequently and are effective in informing students of their progress towards completion of their frameworks. However, many targets agreed with students are too general and do not provide sufficient pace or challenge for them.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been particularly effective action to promote improvement. Curriculum area staff and work-based learning teams now work much more closely together and have a clear focus on improving success rates. The monitoring of learner progress is well managed with information available to staff via interactive spreadsheets, together with regular meetings that target individual students' progress.

There are now sufficient well qualified staff in place to deliver the programmes and support the students.

Work-based learning area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction WBL	5	3

Context

The college offers a range of construction craft apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in wood occupations, trowel occupations and electrical installation. At the time of re-inspection there were 26 work-based learners on wood and trowel occupations apprenticeships at level 2 and level 3, and 34 on electrical installation advanced apprenticeships.

Strengths

- improved and high success rates for level 2 apprentices
- high standard of students' work
- good progression from level 2 to level 3 in wood occupations.

Areas for improvement

- no full framework achievements for advanced apprentices in electrical installation
- poor target-setting in students' progress reviews
- inadequate self-assessment report for construction work-based learning.

Achievement and standards

Success rates for apprentices in wood and trowel occupations have improved quickly and are now high. They have risen from 17% in 2004/05 to 67% in 2005/06, which is well above the national average. However, no advanced apprentices in electrical installation have achieved the full framework in the last three years. A third of those who left in 2005/06 did achieve their NVQ, which enabled them to progress to work as qualified electricians. Apprentices enjoy their training and produce high quality work. Two students have achieved regional awards. Progression in wood occupations is good with over a third of students progressing from their level 2 apprenticeship to an advanced apprenticeship in 2005/06. Key skills achievements are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Initial assessment and diagnostic tests are effective in identifying students' key skills levels and any support needs. Students receive appropriate support from their tutors and work place

supervisors. Assessment planning is satisfactory and is now helping to improve the slow progress previously made by students in wood occupations. Students are recording appropriate evidence for their NVQ in log books and portfolios. However, target-setting in students' reviews is poor and new procedures are not fully implemented. For example, one student had a number of actions to complete but was unsure of the priorities or timescale in which to complete them. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Resources are satisfactory, with appropriate off-the-job facilities, tools and equipment.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of work-based learning works closely with the construction curriculum leaders to support the delivery of training, and effective teamwork has been effective in bringing about improvement. However, quality assurance is weakened because there is no distinct self-assessment of the work-based learning part of the college's provision in construction. Some instances of poor health and safety practice were observed during the inspection.

Work-based learning area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Sport and leisure WBL	4	3

Context

There are currently 15 students on apprenticeship programmes, one of whom is an advanced apprentice. They are all being trained in coaching, teaching and instructing in the context of swimming. All of the learners are employed. The college subcontracts all aspect of the apprenticeship framework. Students can join at different points throughout the year.

Strengths

- effective preparation for the world of work
- successful links with employers and industry
- good recent actions to improve the quality of provision.

Areas for improvement

- ineffective promotion of courses to attract under-represented groups.

Achievement and standards

Framework success rates in 2003/04 and 2004/05 were very low. However, there has been a significant improvement in 2005/06, with 59% of students achieving the full framework, which is satisfactory. Some current students have achieved their apprenticeship before their planned end date, and most

of the rest are on track to achieve. Students are effectively prepared for working in the leisure industry. In addition to their apprenticeship, students achieve a range of additional qualifications, for example in first aid and coaching. Students develop appropriate skills, and gain in self-esteem and confidence. Many students gain promotion in their current jobs. The standard of students' work is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching, training and learning are satisfactory. Workshops for delivering different courses, such as the technical certificate in swimming, are well planned. Assessment and internal verification practices are satisfactory and meet national standard requirements. Assessments have improved, and clear written feedback is given to students following assessment. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Progress reviews are undertaken on a regular basis with the involvement of employers and staff. There are adequate arrangements for the induction process onto the programme and in the work place. Resources are satisfactory. Students work in leisure industry standard placements. These provide a wide range of teaching opportunities in swimming in order to acquire the understanding and skills needed for students' job roles. Links with employers and industry are effective in supporting curriculum development and improving the range of provision.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Quality assurance procedures have improved, and recent actions to improve the quality of provision have been successful in raising success rates. Students have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and an awareness of equal opportunities. However, little effort is made to promote the apprenticeships to non-traditional groups of students, for example, those with disabilities or those from minority ethnic groups.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: Northbrook College
Date of visit: 14 and 15 November

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Success rates in 2005/06

- Provisional data for 2005/06 show a significant improvement in success rates compared with 2004/05. On long courses, success rates have improved for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3, and for adults at levels 1 and 2. Success rates are now above the national averages at all levels except for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3, where despite the improvement they remain low. Across the college as a whole, pass rates are high, but retention rates are low for both age groups at level 3. Success rates for adult on short courses (5-24 weeks) are low.
- When analysed by sector subject areas, there is considerable variation in students' achievements. Success rates on long courses are high in health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise (including hairdressing and beauty therapy, and hospitality and catering), and preparation for life and work. However, success rates are very low in ICT. In both business and construction there has been some improvement in success rates over the last year, although they remain low in business. In arts, media and publishing, although success rates are satisfactory, they have declined in comparison to the national average over the last three years.
- The college recognises the need to take action to further improve retention rates on level 3 courses, particularly those taken by students aged 16 to 18, and is seeking external support to develop appropriate improvement strategies.
- Overall success rates in work-based learning (WBL) have continued to improve, and are now satisfactory. However, timely success rates remain below the national average.

Attendance rates

- Attendance data are increasingly reliable following the introduction of an electronic registration system which has, this year, been extended to

cover part-time students. However, there is no college-wide policy on attendance monitoring. Absences from lessons are vigorously followed-up in some curriculum areas. The extent to which attendance data are used to analyse patterns of attendance and develop strategies to improve retention rates is inconsistent. Data for full-time courses in 2004/05 show an attendance rate of 85%, which is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Progress on the 14-19 agenda, and the extent and quality of provision for 14-16 year-olds

- The college has clear ambitions to develop its 14-19 provision to better meet the needs of students from the local community. The college has been slow to develop this aspect of its work, but a strategy to raise rates of transition from local schools, and to respond to local and national 14-19 initiatives, is in development. The college is appropriately involved in local partnerships to pursue the implementation of the 14-19 agenda.
- The college offers a wide range of programmes for school pupils aged 14-16, with several hundred pupils involved. The involvement of curriculum areas in this provision is variable. The scope of the 14-16 provision has emerged as a consequence of hard work by a relatively small number of staff rather than as a result of a coherent college-wide strategy to develop links with schools. The quality of the 14-16 provision is good, as is recognised in the overall self-assessment report. However, programme area reviews throughout the college have little to say about 14-16 provision, perhaps indicating the relatively low profile of this work historically. The manager with overall responsibility for the provision now reports directly to the principal, an arrangement designed to raise the status of this aspect of the college's work.

The quality of WBL provision

- New policies and procedures are beginning to have an impact in ensuring that learners are supported to complete their apprenticeships. The roles and responsibilities of all those involved in running the WBL provision are clearer, and managers are using data more effectively to bring about improvements.

Developments in the college's strategy on adult and community learning (ACL)

- The college has revised its fee structure for ACL programmes to help to attract learners following a decline in enrolments in 2005/06. So far in 2006/07 the proportion of cancelled courses is lower than in the same

period in the previous year. The college offers a broad range of courses in direct response to the local community's needs and requests.

What is the quality of provision in the college's centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs)?

- CoVE status has led to improvements in both business and finance and aeronautical engineering. In both cases, the CoVE status has enabled the college to expand its curriculum in direct response to the needs of local industry. The CoVEs are well-managed and the funding has been used responsibly and effectively.

Leadership and management

New management structures

- Since the last visit, the restructuring of the senior management team has been completed, with new curriculum directors in place, and a new vice principal responsible for finance. Programme area managers welcome the support and challenge they are now receiving from the curriculum directors, and show willingness to develop their roles to take greater responsibility both for the quality of provision in their own areas and for cross-college matters. Lines of accountability are now much clearer. Although it is too early to gauge the impact of these changes on students' outcomes, there is a clear determination amongst senior managers to tackle under-performance. The priority of senior managers is to raise success rates. Leaders recognise that, in order to achieve this, there is much work to do to improve the quality of teaching and learning, which the college judges to be satisfactory.

Improvements in quality assurance

- Good progress has been made in improving quality assurance and the arrangements for self assessment. Responsibilities are now much clearer. The vice principal for curriculum and quality, along with the curriculum directors, have direct responsibility for quality in the areas that they manage, an improvement on the previous arrangements. The draft overall self-assessment report is significantly better than last year's version, and gives clear judgements on key questions with appropriate indicative evidence. Further work needs to be done to provide secure evidence of the college's capacity to improve. Programme area reviews are still variable in quality, with a lack of clarity in some judgements. The underlying paperwork for producing programme area reviews is cumbersome, and is unlikely to be seen by course leaders and lecturers as a useful tool for quality improvement.

- The college has taken steps to increase the number of lesson observations undertaken in order to reach accurate judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Appropriate action is being taken to minimise the amount of inadequate teaching. Managers recognise that there is much to do to raise the proportion of lessons that are good or better. The intention to develop clearer links between lesson observations and appraisal may, if effective, provide a mechanism to assist in improving teaching.

The use of data to bring about improvement

- The college is making good progress in collecting and using reliable data, and was able to provide comprehensive data on students' outcomes in 2005/06 during the visit. Programme area managers report that they now have a greater understanding of the data that they have access to, and are beginning to use it to analyse trends more thoroughly. However, the college is not yet at the stage where data are routinely used to inform detailed analysis of provision and quickly identify and improve areas of weaker performance.

Progress made in improving the promotion of equality and diversity

- The promotion of equality and diversity remains an area for improvement. Although individual support for students is particularly good, there is insufficient emphasis on raising students' awareness of diversity. Coverage at induction is too brief and students are given too little information about diversity to broaden their knowledge and understanding. Within curriculum areas, and around the college, there is insufficient evidence of the promotion of equal opportunities. The principal now chairs the college equality and diversity committee, but as yet there is no college action plan for the promotion of equal opportunities.