



Reaseheath College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
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Inspection report

Audience
Post sixteen

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130623

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Reaseheath College
Type of college:	Specialist Land-based Further Education College
Principal:	Meredydd David
Address of college:	Reaseheath College Nantwich Cheshire CW5 6DF
Telephone number:	01270 625 131
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Chair of governors:	John Platt OBE
Unique reference number:	130623
Name of lead inspector:	Bev Barlow HMI
Dates of inspection:	25-29 September 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Reaseheath College is a specialist land-based college in Cheshire. The college provides an extensive range of courses from pre-entry and foundation level through to level 3 and higher education, mostly in land-based and rural provision. The college works very closely with local, regional and national partners to meet the needs of rural industries and communities. The college's mission is "to inspire individuals, communities and rural businesses through delivering outstanding education and skills development accessible to all."
2. Just over half the college's students are recruited from the Cheshire area and the rest are from 150 local authorities throughout the country. Accommodation is available for 300 residents. In 2004/05, the college enrolled 3,216 further education (FE) learners. The number of full-time learners has increased significantly since the last inspection from 684 to around 1,000 learners. The majority of full-time learners are aged 16-18 and most of the 900 part-time learners are adults. There is a growing work-based learning programme that currently includes 180 apprentices. In 2005/06 the college provided adult and community learning courses for approximately 3,000 learners for Cheshire local authority. Through its partner universities, the college delivers higher education courses to around 300 learners. Links with local schools enable 350 Key Stage 4 students to study and sample vocational qualifications.
3. The very small number of learners from minority ethnic groups is representative of the area in which the college works. The college has achieved national recognition in a wide range of land-based industry awards and competitions. It delivers a range of national and bespoke industry training programmes. The college is identified as a centre of excellence in dairy processing and is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in food chain technology.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding: grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: grade 1

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

5. Achievements and standards are outstanding. The college has set very challenging targets for improvement in learners' achievements and meets the vast majority of them. Pass rates for all learners at all levels are now well above the sector averages. Learners make very good progress and develop outstanding industry related skills. Retention has improved in most areas. Success rates of apprentices on work-based training improved greatly in 2006 but the improvements are not consistent across all curriculum areas.
6. The quality of teaching and learning is good and improving. The college has evaluated teaching and learning accurately and has taken effective steps to secure further improvements. In a minority of lessons, there is insufficient use of a range of teaching activities to support learning. Assessment of learners' work and progress is effective. The monitoring of students' progress is thorough and highly effective, particularly on foundation courses.
7. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of students and to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. A wide range of courses is provided for learners of all ages, including school students, learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, employers and the local community. Progression opportunities are available from pre-entry level to higher education. The enrichment programme is popular and extensive and provides many opportunities for learners to achieve additional qualifications.
8. Guidance and support for learners is outstanding. Well focused pre-entry guidance ensures that students are on the right course and quickly settle into college life. Staff inspire and motivate their learners to do well. Initial assessments are comprehensive and lead to prompt and effective individual and in-class support. Learners' additional support needs are identified early, and outstanding support is very effective in improving learners' achievements.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. Leadership is inspirational and promotes very high standards in a positive and supportive culture that aspires to excellence. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and robust. Self-assessment is rigorous and leads to significant improvements. Governance is outstanding. Equality of opportunity is at the centre of all aspects of college life. Financial management and value for money are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

10. The progress the college has made in tackling the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, the significant improvements in learners' success rates and the college's very clear plans for future developments, demonstrate that the college has outstanding capacity to improve. Highly committed governors provide very good oversight of the college's performance. Inspirational leadership is supported well by a strong management team. Staff at all levels are determined to further raise the college's recent improvements in its performance.
11. Quality assurance processes are thorough and have been used effectively to tackle weaknesses. Inspectors agree that the college's self-assessment report is accurate. A rigorous system of lesson observations and sharing good practice has improved the quality of teaching and learning. Managers regularly monitor quality improvement plans and the college has a good record in meeting its challenging targets.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made outstanding progress since the last inspection. Its approach to improving the areas identified as weaknesses at the last inspection is systematic and rigorous. Learners' achievements and the quality of their work show outstanding improvements. The college's strong focus on sharing good practice has had a positive impact. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Assessment practices are more consistently applied and used well by teachers when planning their lessons. Achievements on key skills and apprenticeship programmes have improved significantly. A new central teaching block was opened in 2004 and the college's ambitious capital build programme of £18 million is well advanced.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- very high pass rates for all ages and all levels
- good and improving teaching and learning that reflect industry needs
- outstanding range of provision
- outstanding guidance and support
- very effective additional learning support
- impressive internal communication arrangements
- highly responsive and effective partnerships and links with employers, schools and other providers
- inspirational leadership and highly effective management
- positive and supportive culture aspiring to excellence
- outstanding governance.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- retention rates on a minority of courses
- success rates on directly managed apprenticeships
- the insufficient range of teaching methods used in a minority of theory lessons.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grades:

Work-based learning

Good: grade 2

13. There has been a substantial improvement in the long course success rates since the last inspection, from 45% in 2003 to 76% in 2005. College data for 2006 confirms that the success rates have improved further. The college's success rates for long courses places the college in the top ten performing FE colleges for 2005. Pass rates are above the national average for all ages and on all levels, often by significant amounts.
14. Improving retention was correctly identified by the college as a key area for improvement. In most courses, strategies to improve retention have been effective. In 2004 and 2005, overall retention rates on long courses improved significantly to above the national average. Retention on level 1 and level 2 courses is well above the national averages. On a minority of courses, retention has not improved at the same high rate.
15. Learners benefit from a very wide range of additional qualifications recognised by the land-based industries. Achievements on these courses are outstanding. Success rates on key skills have consistently improved at all levels and are well above national averages. Almost all learners enrolled on entry and foundation level courses succeed and make very good progress. Many learners progress onto a higher level course at the college. In 2005, the majority of school students studying on the college's Key Stage 4 vocational programme were successful and many progressed to further education.
16. Overall, the achievement of work-based learners is good. Success rates on the college's directly managed apprenticeship programmes improved to a satisfactory level in 2006. The college also delivers construction programmes under a subcontract arrangement; framework achievements are very high on this provision.
17. Reaseheath College sets challenging yet achievable targets for learners. Learners develop very good personal and highly relevant practical skills. Learners are inspired to achieve high standards from well qualified and enthusiastic staff and through the many local and national competitions they are encouraged to enter. Learners are, quite rightly, very proud of their recognition and medals from national horticultural and agricultural bodies. The college regularly holds awards ceremonies to celebrate the wide range of learners' achievements. Learners develop excellent industry standard professional skills to support employment and further study. Their coursework

and portfolios are well organised and of a high standard. Learners attain well in lessons, enjoy their studies and benefit greatly from relevant high quality work experience. Attendance rates at 88% are high in relation to similar colleges. In 2005, around 30% of learners progressed to higher education (HE) and most other leavers continue in employment related to their college course.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

Contributory grades:

Work-based learning

Good: grade 2

18. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that a high proportion of teaching and learning is good or better. Several practical sessions are outstanding. The views of inspectors about the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning concurred with those of senior managers. Teachers have benefited from a structured programme of staff development and sharing good practice. Teachers prepare well for their lessons; they make very effective use of their industrial experience and the excellent resources available to them to make learning highly relevant to the needs of industry. Learners value teachers' hard work and enthusiasm for their success.
19. Lessons have clear objectives which build on previous learning. More attention is now given to meeting the needs of individual learners. Helpful profiles of students' learning styles, prior attainment, and support needs are well used by teachers to help plan and deliver lessons. The college estate and industrial sponsorship is used very effectively to enhance learning. For example, the college's dairy herd, food processing facilities and show gardens have a national reputation. Learners on full-time courses benefit from work experience and highly effective coaching in practical lessons. Routine duties on the college estate are used well to develop generic and specific work skills. Learners on higher level courses confidently develop the skills to supervise students on craft and introductory courses. A high priority is given to health and safety. In the less effective lessons, teachers make insufficient use of a full variety of teaching approaches to motivate and stimulate learning. In a number of theory lessons, the teacher spent too much time talking, without sufficiently checking learning.
20. Lesson plans identify appropriate opportunities for developing key skills, and assignments include the assessment of key skills in vocational contexts. Key skills are now planned throughout the course for full-time learners, and towards the beginning of the programme for apprentices. While progress towards completion of some apprenticeship frameworks has been slow, these groups now have improved monitoring of learner progress and rising success rates.

21. Assessment is regular and effectively supports learning. The best assignments ensure learners analyse and interpret as well as just find and record information. The quality of marking is good; teachers' feedback helps learners improve the quality of their work.
22. The college's approach to meeting the needs and interests of learners and to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The curriculum provides excellent progression opportunities from pre-entry level to higher education. Courses are flexible and accessible for learners, employers and local communities. Learners benefit from many opportunities to gain specialist qualifications. For example, the college has attained a licence in zoo-keeping which enables learners to manage and become qualified in caring for a very wide range of animals. The college has excellent links with local schools and provides a highly successful curriculum for 14-16 year olds. Students can choose from a range of seven vocational options, all leading to a recognised qualification.
23. The college's responsiveness to the needs of employers is outstanding. Links between college departments and a wide range of both small and large multi-national employers are well established and mutually beneficial. The college offers many high quality courses tailored to suit employers' specialised requirements. The college's innovative work in food technology is highly beneficial to students' learning. For example, learners access state of the art facilities and laboratories and experience first hand the processes in trialling and developing new food products and packaging. The college's business centre is very successful in engaging with local farming communities by providing guidance and training on opportunities for farmers to diversify and develop their business.
24. Learners enjoy and participate in an extensive range of enrichment activities which help to extend their skills and broaden their interests. Residential learners are well-catered for with a range of recreational activities in the evening. The Student Association is proactive in organising activities and events which are well managed and popular. They have been successful in raising significant sums of money for local children's charities. Opportunities for learners to participate in sport and exercise are very good. The college hockey team has had notable successes at county level.
25. The quality of guidance and support is outstanding. Information and guidance to potential learners are highly effective. The college has worked successfully to develop very strong links with a wide network of over 250 schools. Regular communication and taster sessions support learners to make the right choice and have realistic expectations from the very start. Summer schools and induction programmes help learners settle in quickly and enjoy their courses and college life.
26. Personal and welfare support is very strong. Close links with external agencies ensure that the most vulnerable learners are well cared for and able to

continue their studies. The tutorial programme includes a focus on personal and social development and financial literacy. Good health is promoted through enrichment activities and a range of special events. A healthy range of food is readily available in the college's food outlets.

27. Initial assessment of learners' literacy, language and numeracy is very thorough and comprehensive. The quality of both individual and in-class support is excellent. Learners receive the support they need very quickly. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported and play a full and active role in college life.
28. Teachers and course managers have a very good understanding of their learners' individual needs. Learners are supported well by their tutors, who inspire and motivate them to give of their best. One learner summed this special relationship up saying "teachers are more like your friend, they make sure you can get what you want out of life". Individual learner progress, including progress of work-based learners, is reviewed regularly. In most cases this is very effective. In a minority of individual learning plans and tutorial reviews on level 2 and level 3 provisions, the targets identified are not sufficiently precise and the actions needed to achieve them are not clear. Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing learners on foundation courses are exemplary. Retention rates for learners receiving support are very high and they achieve as well as other learners. The monitoring of effectiveness of additional support is comprehensive and results in improvements.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

29. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and vice-principal provide inspirational leadership in a positive and supportive culture which aspires towards excellence. Staff have significant confidence in their leaders, are fully committed to the strategic direction of the college and have a good understanding of how changes will bring further benefits to learners and staff. Strategic planning is consultative; comprehensive annual development plans include challenging targets which the college has met in recent years. Managers are highly effective; clear accountabilities and management training have supported them in successfully raising standards.
30. Quality assurance processes are very effective. Comprehensive course reviews support self-critical, accurate and rigorous self-assessment. Timely and accurate management information supports the processes. A very well developed lesson observation programme has had a significant impact on the quality of the learners' experience. Managers at all levels are clear about what the college does well and where further improvements are necessary. Action plans are monitored carefully. However, the use of some college wide processes to identify good practice and further improve performance is insufficiently systematic.

31. Governance is outstanding. Governors have a broad range of relevant skills and are well supported by the clerk. Corporation meetings are well-focused and governors confidently contribute to good debate. Governors' link arrangement to the college's curriculum and service areas improves their very good understanding of the college. Governors set challenging targets and closely monitor the college's academic and financial performance.
32. The college provides a safe and supportive environment; respect for difference and individual needs of learners is central to the life of the college. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. A well organised equality and diversity group uses data effectively to monitor all aspects of a comprehensive action plan. All staff and governors are trained in equality and diversity issues and child protection matters. The college complies with the statutory requirements of Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The college's arrangements for protecting and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults are very good.
33. Internal communication arrangements are impressive. Partnerships and collaborative activities between the college and a wide range of external partners are highly beneficial to learners. Timely staff appraisals are linked to a well structured professional development programme which focuses on meeting both the needs of the college and personal development to update industrial skills.
34. The college has many very good specialist resources and teachers make good use of the college estate to support learning. Ambitious capital building plans to further improve the quality of facilities are well advanced. Financial management is very good, and the college approach to risk management is comprehensive. The college's diverse range of income is managed very well and the college provides outstanding value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	02/03	251	52.6	61.3	-8.7	163	40.5	52.2	-11.7
	03/04	309	61.2	61.8	-0.7	262	65.6	49.3	16.4
	04/05	466	77.9	65	12.9	570	86.5	61.9	24.6
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	23	30.4						
	03/04	18	38.9						
	04/05	19	52.9						
NVQs	02/03	31	61.3	62	-0.7	6	66.7		
	03/04	57	86	71	15	1	100	59.4	40.6
	04/05	72	80.6	60.3	20.2	10	70	70.9	-0.9
Other	02/03	197	53.8	61	-7.2	157	39.5	51.5	-12
	03/04	234	56.8	60.9	-4.1	261	65.5	48.6	16.9
	04/05	375	78.7	65.7	13	560	86.8	61.4	25.4

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	02/03	538	58.2	58.5	-0.3	321	38.3	56	-17.7
	03/04	604	59.9	61.9	-1.9	270	65.2	54.8	10.4
	04/05	507	75.1	67.7	7.5	276	64.5	61.2	3.3
GCSEs	02/03								
	03/04								
	04/05								
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	43	74.4	72.3	2.1	18	44.4		
	03/04	21	61.9	71.3	-9.4	4	75.0		
	04/05	53	73.6	72.8	0.8	12	66.7		
NVQs	02/03	131	39.7	34.5	5.2	223	33.6	44.3	-10.6
	03/04	64	56.3	41.3	14.9	98	74.5	43.2	31.2
	04/05	53	71.7			88	63.6	54.2	9.4
Other	02/03	364	62.9	63.3	-0.4	80	50	58.7	-8.7
	03/04	519	60.3	63.3	-3	168	59.5	56.8	2.7
	04/05	401	75.8	69	6.8	176	64.8	62.1	2.7

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	02/03	254	41.3	63.9	-22.5	309	23	44.9	-21.9
	03/04	305	61	65	-4	240	50.8	49.3	1.5
	04/05	326	72.7	68.8	3.9	193	62.2	56.1	6.1
A/A2 Levels	02/03	1	100						
	03/04								
	04/05	1	100						
AS Levels	02/03	5	20	62.7	-42.7	1	0		
	03/04	9	11.1	70.9	-59.7	2	0		
	04/05								
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	196	42.9	60.5	-17.6	21	71.4	50.6	20.9
	03/04	41	63.4	45.2	18.3	5	20		
	04/05	76	77.6			6	66.7		
NVQs	02/03	20	70						
	03/04	12	0						
	04/05	1	0						
Other	02/03	32	15.6	68.7	-53.1				
	03/04	243	65.4	66.5	-1.1				
	04/05	248	71.4	67.7	3.6				

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2004 to 2005.

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	66	52	32	61	47
	Advanced	31	19	31	32	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	52	38	38	48	50
	Advanced	44	34	34	43	48

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVO rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	57	28	16	35	24
	Advanced	27	22	19	30	30
2004/05	Apprenticeship	52	33	21	40	29
	Advanced	44	23	21	39	31

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'